

The Forest and Social Change in Early Modern English Literature, 1590–1700

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. John Watkins, Adviser

April 2009

My in-laws, Milton and Katheryn Anderson, have displayed gratifying interest in and tolerance for my constant reading and writing work. I have at times been struck by the pride and faith in me held by all my family, and their confidence has worked to increase my own confidence and happiness in completing this project.

Finally, my greatest thanks go to my husband, Josh Anderson, whose patience, love, and talent at making me laugh have sustained me through this project and through the years. He is truly my best friend.

For my grandmothers,
Evelyn Butterfield Halvorson
and
Veronica Myers Weixel

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Introduction

Forests, Parks, and Chases, they are a noble portion of the King's Prerogative: they are the verdure of the King; they are the first marks of honour and nobility, and the ornament of a flourishing kingdom. You never hear Switzerland or Netherland troubled with forests.

—Francis Bacon, notes for a speech to Star Chamber, 1614 (88)

According to one of its leading thinkers, England was both blessed and troubled by its forests. Even as he defends James I's exclusive hunting privileges in royal forests, Bacon reveals the difficulty of the kingdom's forests: they are treasured and troublesome precisely because of their role as sources and symbols of English honor rooted in the land. Although royal forests were the king's alone, others—the aristocracy, the gentry, and sometimes the commons—wanted a share of that honor. They laid claim to the forest by various methods and according to their means, gaining royal favor to hunt in the king's forests, building private hunting parks, or poaching. It was a case of deer-stealing that brought Bacon to the Star Chamber to stress the value of forests not only to the king and to England as a nation, but to notions of social status. He goes on to write of sport hunting, "It is a sport proper to the nobility and men of better rank; and it is to keep a difference between the gentry and the common sort." The theft itself is inconsequential; the crime is found in transgressing social boundaries.

The story of England's forests has been figured as a "counter-narrative to that of modernisation" (Langton 7), making them places of "strong resistance and contradiction" to new economic and social models in which "forests were a distinctive landscape expressing pre-modern attitudes and activities" (Langton 9). Forests and woodlands had

always been places of conflict, but the early modern period witnessed, in combination with the pressures of social and economic change, growing worries about the survival of forests. Fears about the widespread destruction of forest resources and the desuetude of royal forest law led many men to believe that English forests faced imminent demise. The heightened sense of urgency as forests faced destruction—or modernity—makes them charged indices to the slow process of social change.

Early modern English literature, and the study of it, has also harbored a deep and abiding interest in forests. Ubiquitous across genres and throughout medieval and Renaissance writing, the forest is charged with myriad complementary and conflicting cultural connotations that are tied to historical forests as well. In 1965 Northrop Frye proposed in *A Natural Perspective* the existence of a distinct space he called the “green world” in Shakespeare’s “forest comedies.” This green world—a space of escape, freedom, and renewal opposed to the court or city—depicts the forest in allegorical and metaphysical terms as a setting that creates and fosters the potential for human transformation. His conception of the forest drew attention from setting as backdrop to the symbolic power of space and its dramatic intervention in plot and character.

Frye’s green world formulation has in many ways directed literary criticism’s approach to forest spaces, and his legacy endures. Scholarship since then often views the forest as primarily symbolic of human passions or as representative of the human psyche. Building on Frye’s foundation are works like Robert Pogue Harrison’s *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, which proposes to explain the antagonism between Western civilization and a wild nature as embodied in forests by tracing a “genetic psychology of the earliest myths and fables” of forests (3) and interrogating the concept of the forest as

a cultural “birthplace.” Jeanne Addison Roberts’s broad survey of the pastoral and Virgilian-inspired “mixed” and “wild” forests in Shakespeare’s works captures the often contradictory and ambiguous nature of forests. In other studies, the forest is subsumed into literary modes and their dominant landscapes. For example, David Young’s *The Heart’s Forest: A Study of Shakespeare’s Pastoral Plays* appropriates woodland into the larger category of pastoral, thereby erasing its distinct character as a historical and literary space.

Undeniably, the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries inherited from that of the preceding centuries the forests of exile, wandering, licentiousness, and chivalry found in Malory, Chaucer, and continental romance. A literary turn of mind helps capture the ideological and metaphorical force of forests as cultural institutions, and literary studies have illuminated the deeply resonant force of the forest on the human imagination and psyche. Such an approach is also true to the mindset of early modern people who often thought about forests in imaginative terms and as places of escape, desire, danger, and healing.

The green world continues to flourish, but another prominent approach to forests in literature—one more concerned with the material of timber than with shady metaphysical coverts—is emerging in the developing field of ecocriticism. Karen Raber’s 2007 bibliographical essay in *English Literary Renaissance* on ecocritical studies of Renaissance literature covers critical work that, in the definition of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, examines “the relationship between literary and cultural artifacts and the natural environment” (151). Such a definition is innocuous enough and flexible enough to encompass a wide range of approaches, arguments, and

conclusions. The potential of ecocriticism to reexamine accepted understandings of literature's engagement with the material natural world has much to offer fields outside its traditional purview of British Romantic and American Transcendental literature. For example, Gabriel Egan's *Green Shakespeare*, the most prominent ecocritical study of early modern literature to date, urges that we reinstate the status of important Renaissance concepts (such as a macrocosm-microcosm formulation of nature) that have legacies and analogues in modern understandings of ecosystems and "the environment." But Raber acknowledges the difficulty of applying ecocritical approaches anachronistically: "the languages with which early modern readers approach the natural world and its inhabitants do not always translate well; and our own green politics can tend either to erase inconvenient aspects of past ecological thought or to view the past with an overly critical and dismissive eye" (168). Modern green politics, especially in formulating a polemical clash between humanity and nature, can obscure the politics of humanity in nature, including the social aspects of early modern English forests.

Both of these literary approaches to Renaissance literature, the green world and green politics, neglect actual early modern forests. Understandings limited to a purely literary examination are misleading and lacking in the knowledge necessary to fully understand, for example, the effusiveness of Bacon's legal testimony and how it might intersect with similar descriptions of the forest in poetry by Shakespeare, Spenser, or Milton. An accurate and nuanced understanding of the forests of early modern literature calls for a historical perspective. Early modern literature engaged with the contemporary political and social negotiations involving the actual forests in England, accommodating

mixed and wild literary forests *and* actual English forests in a complex understanding rooted in topography and a material engagement with the land.

We need to understand what forests meant to early modern English people and how they were employed, as material resources or symbols, in people's relations with each other. What was the significance of forests to early modern England, and why, well before the advent of modern environmentalism, was the prospect of their demise seen as potentially devastating to the realm? What do these fears and anxieties mean? Why did monarchs such as James pay close personal attention to the details of forest management? What was at stake in struggles between the monarch, noble landowners, the gentry, and common people over wooded land? And what significance can be assigned to forests as they appear in early modern English poetry, plays, and prose writings?

Historical scholarship on forests has been primarily agri-historical, tracing the locations, extent, and botanical makeup of English forests. Oliver Rackham's works (1990s) trace the environmental history of forests from the medieval age. More recently, John Langdon and Graham Jones have published *Forests and Chases of England and Wales, c. 1500-1850: Towards a Survey and Analysis* (2005), a multidisciplinary survey of early modern English forests' material, social, cultural, and political history. Daniel C. Beaver's *Hunting and the Politics of Violence Before the English Civil War* (2008) merges political history with cultural history to argue that forests "furnished a landscape for [a] theater of honor" (11) and that conflicts in forests in the 1630s were telling precursors to civil war. A few book-length literary studies consider forests as they existed in early modern England and how they inform writers' use of forest imagery. Harrison's

book considers historical forests to some degree, as does Corinne J. Saunders's work on French forests in medieval romance.

This project combines the historical and imaginative branches in a literary study of nobility in the forest. It explains the role forests played in the social hierarchy—and the uses writers made of the forest—as the English negotiated social and economic changes and evolved from a formerly feudal land to a kingless commonwealth to a constitutional monarchy. It expands interpretation of the forest beyond exclusively literary explanations to incorporate a historically based literary understanding that considers the sociopolitical forces in actual English forests. My particular focus is on nobility in the forest, in the double sense of a noble nature, character, or essence in forest spaces, *and* aristocratic people in the forest. Forests were sites of conflict in England from medieval times and continued to be so in the early modern period as competing groups, including the king, aristocracy, gentry, and commons, claimed rights to forest spaces. As the balance of power began to tilt from the aristocracy toward the middle and lower social strata, the forests of English literature reflect the tumultuous shifts and ambivalence occasioned by social change.

Such social change is—like the long-term process of deforestation itself that changed the English landscape over many centuries—gradual, slow, difficult to isolate, progressing in starts and stops, and (of course, by definition) dynamic. The particular facet of such long-term and broad social change that I am interested in might be called social *influence*, bordering on *agency*. I use the terms *influence* and *agency* to address a degree of power that may not manifest itself in overt political or economic power but in more diffuse ways. Who had, or was perceived to have, sway, voice, or control in and

over the English landscape—and, by implication, England's future? The ideas of influence (indirect persuasive or coercive power) and agency (the ability to effect change) perhaps better address the fitful and uneven gradient of change than a study of established and recognized power in the traditional forms of high political office and the ownership of vast estates. They allow me to examine the influence that a gentleman (not a peer, not a great titleholder) gains through new ideas of land use and that gentleman's sense of agency in how to use his copse of trees for his and his nation's benefit. Both terms rely heavily on perception and representation: how did ranks display their power, view others' role in society, and view themselves? In addition, influence and agency can be seen negatively in absence as well. While the rise of the middling sort provides a historical context to this study, my particular interest is in the fading of aristocratic influence and agency in the forest. Perceptions of possibility, potentiality, loss, nostalgia, engagement, and investment in a dynamic world are better captured by a tempered study of influence and agency than one of demonstrated power.

My use of the ideas and terms *influence* and *agency* are also conducive to literary study. If forests themselves do not have quite the power that Macbeth fears of Birnam Wood, literary representations, as I will show, are often infused with a powerful influence over characters within them, sometimes bordering on agency. In addition to the more than passive role the forest plays in many literary works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the forest is related to the influence and agency of poets themselves. In an era developing the roles of the poet laureate and the professional writer (many of whom claiming those roles were themselves of nonnoble rank and interested in advancement), the forest proves attractive for a self-representation of the poet's work and his or her

status. “Influence” and “agency” relate to how writers and poets saw their role in society and in shaping visions of England’s social future, and at many moments, poets seem to identify with their imagined forests or are personally invested in the story their forests tell.

By spanning the historical and the imaginative, the material and the conceptual, my approach aims to better understand social change at this historical moment when the forest, so central to English society’s and poetry’s sense of self, straddled premodernity and modernity. One way I examine the forest in this project is by foregrounding two spectrums, or axes, on which the forest as social, political, and cultural space exists. One is an axis of the material and nonmaterial. The material entails the forest as natural resource (to use a modern term) and the uses of forests for subsistence and economic gain. Examples of the nonmaterial forest are the legal construction of royal forests (as demonstrated by forest law, royal proclamations, or Bacon’s testimony, for example) and literary depictions of forests spaces. A second axis would be the social spectrum of people who claimed materials, rights, honor, or social identity in the forest. This axis includes those groups already mentioned and broadly sketched as commons, gentry, aristocracy, and monarch, and it captures the heterogeneity of the forest as a historical space. Early modern poetry can help us gauge change by suggesting where writers’ understandings of the forest fall on the field created by these two axis. Who is identified with forest spaces, and in what ways? What control do various groups claim over forests? How does a particular social rank use the material forest or a conceptual forest to further its goals? How do writers place the forest in their own explorations of social relations? In what ways does the literary forest resemble the historical forest? And how does the

literary forest display, intervene upon, or redirect the energies of the historical forest in explorations of social and poetic power?

As this project addresses these questions, the question of genre becomes prominent in understanding the intersection between landscape, rank, and poetry. Literary studies that focus on early modern locales and landscapes often do so within a framework of broadly defined genres. Scholars write of city comedies, country house poems, and domestic tragedies, defining genre partly in terms of place. On the simplest level, pastoral poetry is characterized by shepherds in idyllic pastures, georgic poetry celebrates agriculture with plowed fields, and both genres present a view of nature as cultivated and dominated by men. The forest looms on the borders of civilization as a wild and dangerous place, and though forests are loosely associated with romance, they are ubiquitous in early modern literature. The forest as a literary space presents a flexible and powerful tool for writers looking to capitalize on its deep-rooted associations (literary and historical) but also to revise or transform already socially charged early modern genres. Many of these modes and genres, such as chivalric romance, pastoral, and country house poetry, are invested and engaged in self-aggrandizing myths of an aristocratic social model, celebrating nobility. But like the historical royal forest, sheltering noblemen and harboring nobility itself, the literary forest proves troublesome. As a destabilizing space, subject to long-standing resistance and claims of entitlement by people across the social spectrum, the forest offers writers a powerful way to disrupt the social implications of genre. Their skillful adaptation of generic conventions, enabled by the imagined space of the forest, suggests new social possibilities in the historical world.

This project argues that Renaissance poets Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton

employ forest imagery and settings in ways that register a slow decline of land-based aristocratic influence and accompanying social markers. These poets show awareness of the shifting balances of sociopolitical forces and use the forest to undercut structures of land-based authority. At a time of struggle between the Crown and the nobility, growing influence of the middle ranks, and evolving economic and political ideas, literary depictions of forests build upon the unrest associated with historical forests to suggest new social arrangements. I trace this convergence of landscape, literature, and social rank in forest law and forestry manuals, stage comedy, romance epic, brief biblical epic, and country house poetry. These works reveal how writers use literary forests, embodying the ambivalence of social change, to suggest the end of familiar social myths and the possibilities for a new social landscape.

I begin by tracing a history of forest conflict that emerges in the late sixteenth century in competing visions for the use and control of English woodlands. Opposing claims to the forest are encapsulated in two texts that make rhetorical and social arguments for the stewardship of forests. John Manwood's legal treatise *Lawes of the Forest* (1598) defends the monarch's exclusive rights in royal forests and presents kingly prerogative as necessary to England's national security. Arthur Standish's *The Commons Complaint* (1611) warns, "no wood, no kingdom," and he urges the humbler gentry to ensure England's wellbeing by cultivating forests on their land. Together these texts reveal the conspicuous absence of aristocratic voices, despite the association of forests with nobility in chivalric romance and the aristocracy's ownership of great tracts of woodland. This chapter elucidates a social debate about land use that excludes aristocratic interests and looks forward, rather than nostalgically backward, to evolving

economic and political ideas about social influence and agency in the nation.

The second chapter examines a literary representation of nobility in the forest in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) and *As You Like It* (1599). Both plays link dukes with forests and suggest a reciprocal exchange of authority between land and the ruler who claims it. Duke Theseus's palace wood in *Dream* approximates an English royal forest, yet while his explicit and implicit presence infuses it with authority, he is comically unaware of greater forces at work there that dictate his government to him. In the forest of the latter play, the exiled Duke Senior is humbled, one princess purchases land, and another cross-dresses to direct the events of the play. The characteristic chaos of comedy is brought to order by the forest of Arden, a space closely associated with a celebrated English past. As if heeding Touchstone's words to "Let the forest judge," Arden restores the duke to court and reasserts normative gender and class roles that will prevail *outside* the forest. In this way the forest supports a social structure capped by a legitimized aristocracy, yet within the contentious wood, characters discover a socially destabilizing space that denies exclusive authority to the highborn and makes sources of power contingent upon merit and accessible to others.

Chapter three enters the forest of the oft-neglected first eight cantos of Book 6 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596) to trace the appearance of the poet as a social spokesman who emerges from the fading shadows of aristocratic power. The aristocracy is embodied in Spenser's intertextual depiction of Tristram and Timias, two forest squires. Their intertextual legacies in medieval romance and their failure to rise as the next generation of knights suggest Spenser's doubts about the long-term efficacy of aristocratic dominance and the romance genre idealizing that social model. Their

inadequacy also sets the stage for the emergence of the humble poet in canto 9, linking the first two-thirds of the book to a structure and telos imbued with Spenser's own engagement with and investment in the social landscape. I argue that as he strives within a system of literary patronage dependent on nobility, Spenser suggests other possibilities for both personal and social advancement. In the same gesture with which he relegates the romance forest and its fading knights to the unrecoverable past, he acknowledges an alternative social discourse in the georgic imagery that emerges in the later books of *The Faerie Queene*. Like Standish, Spenser looks beyond formulations of aristocratic dominance and reimagines the forest as a potentially inclusive space that admits a humble poet-shepherd and his national vision.

Finally, in chapter four I establish previously unacknowledged links between the genre of country house poetry and the banquet scene of John Milton's *Paradise Regained* (1671). I demonstrate that Milton's brief epic employs a parody of the country house poem, extricated from the country estate and placed instead in a forest. The seventeenth-century country house poem celebrates a fading form of aristocratic status while allowing the voice of the lower-status poet its own authority. These works, including Aemilia Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" (1609), Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" (1616), and Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House* (1651), often feature woodland and are a perceivable influence on Milton's poem. As Satan and the Son of God establish their identities and status, they address deference, duty, and power in the normative context of a country house poem—a parody that depicts a divine struggle in the familiar terms of English social relations yet simultaneously subjugates that social structure to a spiritual plane privileged by a staunch regicide and republican. Milton's poem distinguishes

between God's forest as divine creation and the country house great hall of conspicuous consumption. In doing so, it builds upon a proverbial notion of Christian equality, which, when applied to social forms such as the country house poem, undermines England's social hierarchy and resonates in the rumblings of social discontent still latent in its historical and literary forests.

Through the course of these chapters, I aim to illuminate a fundamental awareness and representation of the long-term decline of aristocratic influence and agency as depicted in forests. Forests demonstrate this ideological shift in a material and literary way. I also aim to introduce to studies of early modern forests a historically informed approach to material spaces. The contributions offered by ecocriticism—an emphasis on the materiality of natural spaces, and a shift of attention from the court and the political-mercantile urban center to landscapes of the countryside—require not modern, but “premodern” understandings of those material spaces to avoid anachronistic (and often judgmental) explanations of early modern natural space and its literary and social significance.

Chapter One: “No wood no Kingdome”: The Early Modern Social Struggle
over the Fading Forest

In *The Commons Complaint* (1611), a small book exhorting English landowners to plant trees, Arthur Standish illustrates the potential consequences of failing to heed his foresight. He blames a deplorable scarcity of firewood for driving people to burn straw (which he says would better feed cattle) and cow dung (which would better fertilize fields). Burning these materials depletes the strength of livestock and soils, and it increases the danger of fires, he argues. Before offering a remedy, Standish paints an alarming scenario of “a dearth of corne,” starvation, and fire: “The want of wood causeth too many great losses by fire, that commeth by the burning of straw, and so it may be conceiued, no wood no Kingdome” (2).

The message of Standish’s fire in *The Commons Complaint*, which went through eight editions between 1611 and 1616, spread like fire itself and reveals a distinct anxiety in early modern England about woodland resources and survival, both on the individual and the national level. The sense of imminent deforestation and calamitous results—from dearth to fire to military invasion—made the forested lands of England a national concern and the focus of a number of proposals, Standish’s among them, to preserve the kingdom’s forests. Maintaining woodland meant a stronger national navy and social stability at home. Inspired by the 1607 Midland Revolts (a popular uprising protesting enclosure), Standish believed that a healthily wooded England would better feed its people, fuel prosperity, and quell rebellion. Yet Standish’s little manual for the landowner, meant to contribute to such social stability, itself engages in a social debate about agency in England’s forests and the future tied to them. *The Commons Complaint*

may purport by its title to publicize the straits of the commons, but in its answer to the problem, it figures the landowner, a gentleman farmer, as hero.

It also found support in high places. The 1613 edition, titled *New Directions of Experience to the Commons Complaint*, boasted the endorsement of James I, who praises Standish for addressing the problem of “increasing of Woods, the decay whereof in this Realme is universally complained of” (1613, A2). Standish’s book presents what appears to be a united front concerning forests, for centuries contested spaces and resources. It combines the voice of a country gentleman with the king’s first-person endorsement in advocating woodland husbandry as a way subjects can guard against the threat of timber dearth and a resulting national weakness. Throughout his reign, James, an avid hunter, concerned himself personally with the problem, issuing proclamations warning his subjects to heed forest law, involving the Star Chamber in prosecuting offenders, and enacting measures to preserve timber, such as a 1605 moratorium on building new houses within one mile of London and burning timber (Great Britain 11:534).¹ The king’s encouragement of proactive agricultural techniques signifies the great importance of woodlands.

Yet a large body of landowners, the peerage and upper nobility, are conspicuously absent in Standish’s book and in the forest discussion in general. Although James addresses “all Noblemen, Gentlemen, and other our loving Subjects” (1613: A2r), *The Commons Complaint* has humble aims and assumes an audience of rather humble origins. Standish instructs a reader presumably familiar with (and personally interested

¹ See, for example, a stern declaration of around 1604 threatening full enforcement of forest laws concerning deer (Great Britain 12:451-52) and a reference to the prosecution of wood thievery in a royal forest ironically named “Needwood” (Great Britain 12:451).

in) his hedges and the details of agriculture. His instructions for soil preparation, planting, and pruning come from personal experience and that of the “best Commonwealths-men” he surveyed (1611: A2v). That the book is itself a result of his “poore labours” (1611: A3r) and functions as a *manual* (not a word Standish himself uses) suggests its target readership is not of the leisured aristocratic rank, but those who work with their hands or closely supervise men who do. Standish also hints at “profit to thy King, Countrey, and to thy self also” that results from “charitable industrie” (1611: B) in terms concordant with the values of profit, productivity, and improvement upheld by the middling sort.

Another work addressing the problem of England’s forests perhaps more directly assumes an aristocratic audience, yet offers the nobility—great landowners themselves—no prominent role in the forest’s future. John Manwood’s *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest* (first circulated in 1592 and first published in 1598) purports to collect and communicate to errant readers the ancient laws of royal forests.² These rules, which Manwood presents as integral to the king’s prerogative as protector of the realm and as

² When referring to the spaces designated as falling under forest law, I will use the term *royal forest*. Otherwise, my use of the word *forest* entails a modern sense of wooded land. Royal forests were legally defined tracts of land subject to forest law rather than common law and not necessarily wooded. Bounded by recognizable geographic markers such as streams, roads, or standout trees, forests did often contain trees, as well as arable fields, pastureland, villages, and private estates. They were set aside as game preserves exclusively for the monarch and his or her licensed friends, though they were also frequently maintained for uses other than recreational hunting. Charles Watkins notes that the terms *wood* and *woodland* are equally imprecise and that “the boundaries between woodland, wood pastures, pasture with trees and arable land are difficult to define with precision” (2).

Early modern writers used a range of imprecise terminology to describe woodland. For example, William Shakespeare variously refers to the space in which Livinia is raped and mutilated in *Titus Andronicus* as a “forest” (2.1.114), a “chase” (2.3.254), and a “park” (3.1.88). N. D. G. James records regional variation in forest terminology, and the legal status of a piece of land may not have dictated the words by which people described the land. For example, although current scholarship considers land in the “purlieu” (lands bordering upon a royal forest) that is converted into private hunting space to be a “chase” (as Manwood did), people living in or near it would not necessarily refer to it as such. In practice, words were likely used with less precision than those prescribed by modern scholars or contemporary legal writers such as Manwood.

ancient as the Norman Conquest, govern everything from cutting timber, hunting game, building structures, and raising crops and livestock. If abided by and if enforced, these strictures effectively shackle noble landowners in using their lands and in practicing the honor-seeking sport of the hunt in officially designated forest lands. Although their wealth may buy them limited privileges, the aristocratic ranks are lumped in with all other subjects in Manwood's work. Additionally, forest law, of which the monarch is the sole font, subsumes other sources of authority—including blood, land, and tradition—by which the nobility claimed legitimate power. The monarch enjoyed all benefits—including the honor of the hunt—in royal forests; all others, aristocracy included, pleaded favor.

Even in their respective titles evoking law-making authority and humble supplication, *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest* and *The Commons Complaint* imply opposing strategies, divergent conclusions, and competing visions for the roles of the social ranks in England's future as played out in the land's forests and woodland. And while royal forests and woodland were legally different, topographically and geographically they were often the same, and the blurred distinctions lend themselves to new social arrangements.³ Although these texts deal with technically different types of land, their philosophies about forests and woodland reinforce the tenuous nature of such distinctions and reveal that such tenuousness is also linked to the woodland's role as a cultural battlefield in social relations. These works appear at a critical period in the social history of English forests: the nation seemed to be confronted with the end of its forests,

³ Manwood acknowledges the affinity between forest and woodland, hinting that forests were often established "in the woody countries where great store of couerts were" for the protection of the game (30v), and mixing terms such as "Foresters or Woodmen" (48r), revealing the overlapping associations of wooded forests with other wooded land.

which were not only of economic and military value, but of social value as places that helped create and delineate social status and embody the power of individuals and groups. Disparate groups—criminals, common laborers, gentry, nobles, and kings—appropriated the capital of forests (material, social, and cultural) in constant struggles over resources and status.

A comparison of these two prominent works, Standish's forestry manual and Manwood's legal treatise, reveals competing textual discourses of the historical forest that marginalize aristocratic presence and agency in England's woodlands. They are particularly useful to understanding not only forests, but the social boundaries that defined and organized a society growing rapidly in population and encountering challenges to the accepted way of understanding one's place—geographically and socially—in England.

Two angles help us see how these texts work to exclude noble ranks from active roles in English forests. First, the forest should be examined in its historical context as an institution of English life and a constituent element of England's self-conception as a noble nation entering an era of expansion. Forests were important landscapes and resources economically and militarily, but this chapter examines the social implications of forest spaces, especially in terms of changes in the agency and influence of social rank. Particularly relevant are the contexts of the growing divide between the monarchy and the aristocracy, new economic structures of value, and the rising influence of the middling sort. What did forests and woodlands mean to different social ranks? How did these groups use the forest to define themselves and differentiate their roles in England? How did they use forests to gain power and influence?

Secondly, *The Commons Complaint* and *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest* are textual interventions in that historical debate, and as texts, require attention to their rhetorical and literary approaches. Each employs a strategy through the very form it adopts to communicate a conception of the forest and a vision for its future, including who in England will control the landscape and to what ends. As a husbandry manual and a legal treatise, the generic thrust of each text is infused with specific social agendas, values, and audience expectations. The social shadings of genre, combined with an examination of the organization, authorial voice, narrative concerns, and “protagonists” in each work, enable a better understanding of the early modern discourse of the forest and the ways that discourse is constructed. A literary reading also helps us read against the official rhetoric of power and authority implicit in such texts as these, either supporting or supported by the land’s highest authority, the monarch. Through attention to characterization, rhetorical construction, and narrative concerns, we can read against the grain and read silence and absence—in this case, aristocratic absence.

This chapter examines the role early modern forests played in social identity and changes in social agency, giving particular attention to the noble gloss of the English forest, the competition among social groups for control of woodlands, and the sense of urgency (so vividly voiced by Standish) about forests at the turn of the seventeenth century. It ends with a reading of Manwood’s and Standish’s rhetorical forays into the historical forest debate.

Honor in the Forest: Social Rank and Landscape

This history of the English forest is as vast as its mythology and ubiquitous

literary presence. This project limits its scope to late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literary engagement with nobility (in terms of a noble English essence, and people of high status) in the woods in the context of historical change in English forests. In the 1590s, England faced what many perceived as a deforestation crisis, and a few proposed divergent solutions to a problem that had inherently social implications. Writers, landowners, and leaders asked, what is the value (social, political, economic) of forests? What does the forest mean to England's future? Who will control forests and that future?⁴

One particular episode in the historical record directly engages with these questions. The moment, captured in *The Calendar of State Papers* of Elizabeth's reign, reveals in the words of an earl the noble gloss of the English forest, the competing social groups jockeying for position, and the sense of urgency in a matter of national import. An entry in the *CSP* shows that in November 1592, an offer from a person identified only as "A. B." to relieve the queen of all her forests seems to have gained her serious consideration. The record reveals an understanding of the forest as inherently noble and a question about who—monarch, nobility, or common farmer—will control its future.

What is known about the story exists in one letter from the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard, Baron Howard of Effingham and Earl of Nottingham, to the queen. A. B. had apparently proposed a form of private management of forest land that would continue to be royal forest: he would manage the forest for his own profits and pay the queen annual

⁴ A number of book-length studies trace the political and ecological history of England's forests and related landscapes. See the in-depth studies of Oliver Rackham, N. D. G. James, and Susan Lasdun for thorough histories of English woodland, royal forests, and parks (enclosed hunting parks), respectively. Lester Cantor's account of the medieval landscape gives a thorough discussion of medieval forests, parks, and chases (unenclosed hunting parks).

rent of 20,000 pounds in return. The arrangement would allow him to take pannage rights (allowing a person to keep swine in the forest), herbage rights (allowing a person to graze livestock in the forest), and damaged timber, yet he would continue to protect the deer and healthy trees integral to the forest as a royal hunting preserve. He also asks to circumvent the forest law system, instead preferring to answer to the Lord Treasurer, thereby making unnecessary the presence of the Crown's law enforcement officials such as regarders and verderers (responsible for watching for suspicious activity and trespassing, and for maintaining the forest's vegetation, respectively). All of these "demands" are "very strange," the Lord Admiral sniffs.

His response to the offer is a mixture of disdain and suspicion at the audacity of the offer (he estimates the pannage rights alone are worth 40,000 pounds yearly) and what he seems to see as a shady business offer and a slight on the institution of English forests. The summary of his letter to Elizabeth in *The Calendar of State Papers* captures his objections:

Most timber trees will be found to have a dead bough on the top, or a hole in the body or root, so that the reservation made to her of good timber trees will be of little worth; experience has proved the utter destruction of woods, by warrants and grants for the sale of dotards, under the colour of which the soundest trees have gone. Is grieved to think of the state her woods are now in, and what want there is for building and repairing her ships, which are the jewels of her kingdom. A. B. has promised to plant two for every one that he shall cut down, but the writer's children's children will not live to see them timber trees. [...] trusts he shall not live

to see any such grant, and that Her Majesty, who has found such great fault with the disparking and disforestation done by her predecessors, will not now make her parks, forests, and chases farms. (3:289)

The Lord Admiral suggests the risks of viewing forests solely as a source of revenue: scheming exploitation of the queen and a sly assault on England's strength through the possible "utter destruction of woods" and ostensibly the navy built from them. He is cautious not only about a dangerous duplicity but also about the implications of commercialization for an institution associated with royal grandeur and national glory.

Most importantly, the Lord Admiral's objections to the proposal and his characterization of A. B. reveal the overlay of social status on the landscape of the forest. A. B. seems in the Lord Admiral's view little better than a common forest thief attempting to deceive the queen, arguing that he "Is sure Her Majesty does not think that a poor hound like A. B. must do all this; he does but beat the bush" (Great Britain 3:289). A. B.'s willingness to be a renter of forest land and not an owner links him to poor forest dwellers, popularly held to be lawless and uncivilized squatters. Despite the wealth he apparently commands to be able to offer rent of 20,000 pounds yearly, A. B. is characterized by the Lord Admiral as common laborer in disguise, a reacher whose mere wealth does not qualify him to deal with a queen or govern the English forest institution. He is a mere country gentleman, at best, whose scheme of profit deprives the forest of its nobility and the queen (and, by extension, the aristocracy) benefit of that nobility.

What A. B. proposes to do—to make *farms* (in the Lord Admiral's words) of the queen's forests, parks, and chases—appropriates otherwise noble woodland and forests to become workable land. The Lord Admiral worries about more than just wise resource

management; he worries about the legacy of forests as an ancient institution symbolizing and constituting the nobility of the high born. He expresses as much later in his letter. If she were to agree to the transfer of 180 parks, forests, and chases, “it will be the greatest farm of woods and lands ever let in the kingdom” (3:289), making her the greatest offender of the monarchs whose disafforesting actions (removing the legal status of royal forest) he says she disdains. To farm a forest is simply to lease it out, yet the Lord Admiral’s statements that he “trusts he shall not live to see any such grant” and that the queen could not possibly “make her parks, forests, and chases farms” (3:289) reveal the scorn attached to his use of *farm*. His tone presages Gaunt’s rage at Richard II’s leasing of “This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, / [...] Like to a tenement or pelting farm” (Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 2.1.50–60), or the French Duke of Brittany’s scoffing assertion that should the English win at Agincourt, “I will sell my dukedom, / To buy a slobb’ry and a dirty farm / In that nook-shotten isle of Albion” (Shakespeare, *Henry V*, 3.512-14). Farms are shameful and low places of labor, not the leisure and recreation of nobility. The word *farm* colors the threat from A. B. as not just a bad financial deal, but the degradation of England’s noble forests. Farming a forest (and farming it out) transforms it from a reserved privilege and symbol of power and prestige into a common plot of land, shamefully capitulating by turning it into the hands of commoners who will exploit it and despoil it not only of timber, but of the nobility that infuses the highborn with nature’s blessing.

Raymond Grant claims that “the mere fact that the project was entertained by the queen seems to show how low in importance the Forest had sunk” (186), but I see the episode as revealing how important the forest was to a growing range of people who

recognized their own power to act in and by it as a place and an instrument of social change. In addition, we should note that the Lord Admiral's opinion prevailed; Elizabeth rejected A. B.'s proposal.⁵ The Lord Admiral's response to the offer reveals that Elizabethan noblemen were keenly aware of the forest's import in embodying noble glory and the challenges posed to it. As Lord Admiral, responsible for an English navy fearing another Spanish Armada, he certainly had a professional and "patriotic" concern for timber resources. As second Baron Howard of Effingham and newly created Earl of Nottingham, he may also have had a personal stake in parks and chases on his own lands in Northamptonshire and Surrey. Most certainly, Howard knew that forests expressed noble authority in English society and culture.

Direct control over forests meant presiding over a landscape associated socially and culturally with nobility and prestige. Forests were traditionally noble and held great sway as a possession and a symbol, and the act of using their resources (such as game and timber) and shaping their borders was a claim to that power and prestige.⁶ For while common forest dwellers were suspect and associated with the wildness of an uncivilized

⁵ By contrast, James I seems to have accepted a renewed offer. Records in *The Calendar of State Papers* from the early years of James I's reign show that presumably the same A. B. made the same offer to him fifteen years later, winning a bidding war against a Sir Francis Stoner who had offered to rent the "woods throughout England" for 10,000 pounds more than they brought in at the time (Great Britain 8:388). Despite the objections of advisors including the Earl of Nottingham, the king apparently intended to accept A. B.'s offer and ordered a survey of all his forests and woods in preparation. Arrangements were also made to pay the surveyors, but records of the episode end there. James's dire financial straits likely motivated his acceptance; known as an almost obsessive hunter and fiercely protective of his royal forests, James seemed to value his forests quite highly.

⁶ In the later seventeenth century, for example, the Duke of Beaufort made his house the center of a star-shaped design cut through the surrounding woods, and the neighboring gentry shaped their land to accommodate his. "The duke demonstrated his power to manipulate the lives and environment of lesser mortals and emphasized that all local avenues of power converged upon him," writes Keith Thomas (207). The most orthodox and formulaic of expressions of a natural hierarchy may be the "Scale of Nature as the 'cosmic' justification for the existence of noblemen" (Patrides 64). C. A. Patrides cites Hieronymus Osorius's *De Nobilitate Civile et Christiana* (trans. 1576), which uses an analogy of the forest to justify a highly stratified and naturalized hierarchy: "For trees which are of one kynde spreadeth not their braunches in like fayrenes, nor euery Stede doth his carrire with the lyke loftines, neither euery Lion is of lyke strength" (qtd. in Patrides 65).

space, those who owned woodlands used the forest's mythic, archetypal associations of power and privilege to construct their social superiority. The association was particularly latent in the practice of the hunt. Although Elizabeth I did not overtly promote an image of herself as a hunter (Grant shows that her subjects did not see her that way, primarily because of her sex [185]),⁷ she did take care to create the illusion of a physical presence in her royal forests. George Gascoigne's 1575 edition of *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting*, the most important hunting manual of the day, includes three woodcuts representing Elizabeth on the hunt: two with her ladies-in-waiting on a formal hunt, and in the third surrounded by huntsmen and hounds, taking the ceremonial knife in hand after the killing of a buck (Berry 6). In the 1611 edition of Gascoigne's work, visible lines on the woodcut show where Elizabeth's figure was cut out of the block and replaced by an image of James I (Berry 9). Physically, pictorially, and administratively, the monarch's presence in the wood associated forests with royalty and made of them a font of ancient nobility.

Elizabeth I and James I in particular paid close personal attention to matters of the forest, and Tudor and Stuart monarchs in general applied forest law punitively to ostensibly protect royal privileges and (especially as the seventeenth century progressed) to assert legal and fiscal control over the aristocracy. The two Justices of the Forests (one each for each side of the Trent) were prestigious positions paying 200 pounds annually by Elizabeth's time and were often granted to members of the peerage. Henry VIII's Justice of the Forest north of the Trent was Thomas Cromwell, who held Forest Eyres (the

⁷ Rackham, in contrast, characterizes Elizabeth I as "the mightiest hunter of all English sovereigns," noting that she often invited herself to her subjects' parks (159). Her hunting expeditions may have had less to do with sport than reminding her subjects that their prestigious parks were kind gestures on her part, existing only with her permission.

highest forest court) in 1539 and reported the proceedings, including accusations of waste against Katherine Parr's brother, Sir William Parr, directly to the king himself (Grant 184). A system of lesser forest courts applied forest law at the local level. These courts and related forest officers would, for example, enforce Edward VI's decrees that those caught hunting without license were to pay fines and serve three years' imprisonment with possible banishment (Grant 185). During Elizabeth I's reign, authorities imposed fines in the Forest of Dean every six weeks for long-bow hunting, cutting down large branches, digging up trees, and collecting acorns (Grant 185). James I issued stern proclamations expressing disappointment at the lack of respect poachers showed him and threatening swift action if forest laws were flouted, and he kept informed on the prosecution of poachers (Grant 187). That monarchs took personal interest in such matters, rather than delegating them, shows a remarkable concern and centralized attempt to control the forests of the kingdom and the subjects within them. Even if they weren't always in the forest with a pack of hounds, kings and queens imposed a presence felt by noble landowners and commoners alike.

The greatest challengers to royal privilege in the woods, the landowning nobility, were gingerly handled by the Crown, but handled nonetheless. Noble service was subsumed into Crown endeavors, as the offices of the Justices of the Forest and the deferential tone of the Lord Admiral's letter suggest. Another way the monarch guarded the exclusive prestige of the forest was to lend royal prestige, in limited quantities, to the aristocracy. The font of nobility flowed from the queen and her royal forests (which married the divine right of monarchy to a celebrated English landscape) to the nobility who imitated the monarch with their own parks and chases, private versions of the

Crown's forest institutions.

These parks and chases, as prominent examples of the monarch's favor and places of the ancient tradition of the aristocratic hunt, embodied a claim to nobility in their very existence. Parks were estimated to comprise around two percent of the country (Rackham 152) at their apex around 1300, and Christopher Saxon's Elizabethan maps show more than 800 private deer parks (Thomas 201).⁸ In addition to the prestige of royal favor that granted gentlemen permission to build parks, such spaces cultivated nobility through ancient tradition. Rackham credits Henry VIII with "the most distinctive feature of the English park tradition: the 'pseudo-medieval' park with its appearance of antiquity," created by retaining old trees extant from before the park was created (159). He conjectures that park designers incorporated small stands of trees, pollards (trees harvested by cutting at head level to keep new growth out of the reach of grazing animals), hedgerows, and large trees preserved from pre-existing hedgerows and fields to enhance visual beauty and maintain the "medieval" character of the landscape (159).⁹ Early modern parks were distinctly and deliberately medieval in their material and social legacies, suggesting a social hierarchy legitimized by a history extending time out of mind and reflecting a strategy of the monarch to control the allocation of nobility by controlling the uses of land itself.

But the history of the forest shows that such a strategy had its failures, of course, and was not applied without challenge. The long history of the forest is one of constant social negotiation that suggests, despite forest law and centralized monarchy, that

⁸ Rackham bases his estimate on a list of 3,200 parks in eight counties.

⁹ Hatfield Forest, which exemplified the "medieval compartmental Forest," contained cattle, deer, timber trees, scrub, coppice stands (trees harvested by cutting at ground level, allowing poles to grow for later harvesting), grassland, fen, a "medieval Forest Lodge," and houses on the forest boundary (Rackham 180).

woodlands remained at some level fundamentally ungovernable. The most immediate examples of insubordination may be the relatively commonplace instances of poaching, by commoners as well as gentry, and general forest riots, such as the 1607 Midlands Riots, associated with the peasantry. The strictures of forest law often imposed difficult circumstances on the people who lived within its invisible boundaries. Henry VIII, the last English king to establish a new royal forest, created the forest of Hampton Court near his new palace of Nonesuch through an unorthodox act of Parliament in 1539 (Grant 183), so burdening the residents of the newly created forest that he was forced to grant them special privileges to cut wood and build fences without license (Manwood 29r).¹⁰

Landowners, rather than peasants, however, were most affected by forest law restrictions, and the tumultuous social history of forests in England pits the nobility against the Crown. Accounts of the advent of the English forest begin with the Norman William I, whose passion for the hunt was reputed to have resulted in the first royal forests, including the Forest of Dean and New Forest, and the beginning of centuries-long strife over them. The commentary to Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* offers an "antique verse" as proof of William's "tyranny" in New Forest:

Vor he cast out of house and hom of men a great route,
 And binom their lond thritti mile and more thereabout,
 And made it all forest and lese the bests bor to fede,
 Of pouer men diserited he nom litel hede:
 Therevore therein vell mony mischeving. (46)

¹⁰ The newest royal forest didn't survive much longer than Henry VIII (Grant 183). Daniel Beaver records a similar situation in which, as a result of negotiations between the Crown and local communities that had resisted forest law, James I made special allowances to approximately 2,000 villagers who lived within Windsor Forest.

Drayton sympathizes with poor men, yet emphasizes the idea of land and inheritance, the basis of aristocratic claims to nobility. In disinheriting men of their lands, William disrupted native English social rites. Perhaps he recognized this, as he allegedly legitimated his right to establish forests with the *Constitutiones de Foresta*, which he purported to originate with Canute at Winchester in 1016 to give it validity in the eyes of the Saxons (James 9).¹¹ By 1184, the Assize of Woodstock confirmed that forests were subject to a set of forest laws separate and independent from common law (James 10).

The resentment of the nobility persisted, however, erupting again in 1215. Motivated in large part by expansions of forest borders and encroachments upon private property, nobles forced King John to accept the *Magna Carta* in 1215, including forest-related clauses 44, 47, 48, 52, and 53, the last of which disafforested all forests he and his immediate predecessors had created since William I. This conflict between the nobles and the king is perhaps the most prominent example of the struggle between parties for control of lands closely tied to social status, political power, economic wealth, and the nebulous but powerful aura of English “nobility” as an essence materialized in, among other things, woodland. While the commons en masse and widespread uprisings could of course pose significant threats to the monarch, most challenges came instead through the continuing aristocratic resistance to a Crown busied with centralizing power in the Tudor and Stuart periods in great part by relieving the powerful nobility of its own. Forests were one historical site of this struggle.

Conflicts with insubordinate subjects—high status and humble—were persistent. Robin Hood mythology, featuring a sometimes-noble rebel upholding traditional

¹¹ Manwood includes the purported *Carta de Foresta* of Canutus in Latin at the beginning of his treatise.

practices and common rights, straddles the two fronts of forest insurrection: noble resistance and common crime. Poaching, collecting brush and firewood, harboring livestock in forest lands, and felling timber were probably widespread practices among people living in and near royal forests, despite articles passed in 1564 “devised for the reformation of sundry disorders in the forest, chaces, and parks” (Great Britain 1:237). Villagers resented the denial of access to forests to graze livestock or collect wood (Thomas 200) and extortion by profit-seeking forest officials (Manwood 202r), and they resisted subversively and occasionally overtly. On the simplest level, they took advantage of forest resources by gradual encroachment.¹² Other times they resisted openly. Crown officials and noble landlords engaged in many “bitter disputes” with foresters (Thomas 195), exemplified perhaps by an ongoing dispute over common rights to timber in Enfield Chase that “went on for two and a half centuries, sword, axe and musket being met with prison and occasionally gallows” (Rackham 178).¹³

Such local, ongoing wars fueled fears about widespread rebellion. An act of Parliament in Henry VII’s first year as king associated poachers with “past grete and heinous Rebellions, insurrecons, Rioutts, Robberies, murders and other inconveniences” (qtd. in Grant 181). The 1485 act labeled “tumultuous hunting at night by persons with painted faces or otherwise disguised’ an offense against the royal prerogative” (Richard

¹² The Court of the Exchequer describes lax enforcement in the Forest of Waltham: “But afterward that Royall and princelie pleasure [of hunting] being not so much esteemed [...] the lesse care of the due execucon of the forest lawes consequentlie ensued...whereof the inhabitants of the said fforest ... taking advantage, did by degrees, [...] encroach upon the said fforest lawes by communing with sheepe” (qtd. in Grant 185).

¹³ The uncivilized nature of forest dwellers and the remote, hidden enclaves in the woods were viewed warily by the Crown as a breeding ground for treason. John Norden, cartographer and surveyor, reveals the distrust expressed toward foresters, where “infinite poor yet most idle inhabitants have thrust themselves, living covertly, without law or religion, *rudes et refractarii*, by nature, among whom are nourished and bred infinite idle frye, that coming ripe grow vagabonds, and infect the Common Wealth with most dangerous leprosies” (St. John).

Wilson 75). Poachers become rebels, leading insurrections and inciting violence, disturbing the peace of the realm and challenging the king's and the nobility's authority over the land.

Such formulations of the violent forest ruffian embody threats to the noble forest, yet the most insidious danger to nobility of forests, parks, and chases crept in quietly with the march of history: economic and social change. The expense of maintaining forests led Tudor and Stuart monarchs and nobles to sell or disafforest their lands to unburden their strained budgets.¹⁴ For despite the valuable social currency of the monarch's image as hunter, maintaining administration of the land and herds of deer for the exclusive use of a privileged few was expensive. Hunting spaces had come to be viewed as "anachronistic and unprofitable," better cultivated for timber (Grant 186-87). Henry VII began leasing away unprofitable forests during his reign (Grant 183), and following Tudors began to think of forests in terms of timber and ships (Grant 184).¹⁵ Economic woes forced even James I, famously jealous about his forests, to adopt a tough-minded view. By his accession in 1603, a significant amount of land remained under forest law, although much of it had been enclosed for tillage. James plowed ahead in a vigorous campaign to reinforce and re-enforce forest law as much for his revenue streams as his hunting prerogative (Grant 187).

Although peasants had fought for rights of common over the centuries, hoping to

¹⁴ Thomas believes that royal forests were not viewed primarily for the economic value of their timber until the late seventeenth century (201), but Elizabeth's 1592 flirtation with farming her forests shows an increasingly economic view of an institution previously viewed as a necessary status symbol and space of monarchical glory.

¹⁵ Like her predecessors, Elizabeth I sold forest rights for ready cash. In 1563 landowners in the Forest of Essex paid her 500 pounds to be allowed to disafforest their land (Grant 186). In 1592 she granted the Earl of Essex "so many parks royal [...] ordered to be disparked" as long as the earl paid for the timber (Great Britain 3:264).

achieve less restrictive access to forest resources, the forest challengers from the lower levels were not just poachers and unauthorized woodchoppers. Localized crime against forests and parks was managed and contained by the apparatus of forest law and the ideology of social deference. Widespread economic forces were not subject to such systems, however. Buttressed by changing economics and progressive ideas about agriculture, small landowners of the lower ranks, “those that be no lords, as knights, esquires, and simple gentlemen” (William Harrison 120), began thinking of woodland as spaces for land “improvement” and personal and national profit, not recreational hunting. The trumping of status by economics makes offers like A. B.’s or Arthur Standish’s program for planting timber attractive alternatives to the recreational forests, chases, and parks protected by John Manwood’s *Laws of the Forest*. Progressive gentry—wealthy enough but not necessarily elite, interested in new agricultural practices and land for profit as much as status—could make inroads into forests in such an economic atmosphere. The parties represented by Elizabeth, the Lord Admiral, and A. B.—the monarchy, the nobility, and the farmer—had divergent visions for the purpose and potential of woodland spaces, and they worked to stake out their own ground, so to speak, in a developing debate about the future of the English forest.

They were spurred on by a sense of urgency, building toward alarm, stemming from fears that English forests were facing utter destruction. Swift action was required, but by whom, and to what effect? Throughout the early modern period, writers proclaim the belief that ancient England was once a heavily wooded isle, densely tree-covered and green. Like Standish, legal writer John Manwood laments the decline of England’s great forests from their nascent grandeur in *A Treatise on the Lawes of the Forest* (1598). He

describes a prehistoric isle: “As I doe take it, a great part of our most ancient forests in England had there [sic] first beginning in this manner, when this realme, at the first being a wilderness full of great huge woods, because it was not inhabited with people, the same was also full of wild beasts almost of all sorts that are commonly known in England” (29r). Toward the end of the seventeenth-century, in *England’s Improvement Reviv’d*, John Smith reiterates that England had been in ancient times “overgrowne with Woods” (8). In the later eighteenth century, John St. John’s plan for increasing Crown revenue includes as an appendix the only other known work of Manwood and invokes a wooded ancient England in his recommendation to enclose forest wastes. He rebukes opponents of enclosure: “The time hath been when whole shires have been in nature of forest ground. If there had always been such a backwardness to inclose, great part of England had been little better than a mere wilderness” (13). St. John takes advantage of the view of woodland as uncivilized wilderness to spur what he sees as progress. These nostalgic views of England’s apparently uninterrupted ancient greenwood support the writers’ respective agendas by aiming to inspire observance of the law, tree planting, and enclosure. St. John’s impatience signals that forests survived the seventeenth century and fear for their survival had waned. The ancient expanse of England’s bosky groves was likely more myth than historical reality, however, and the powerful symbolism was heightened in the early modern period by a fear of the greenwood’s rapid disappearance.¹⁶

¹⁶ Historians have not agreed upon the extent of forests and woodland in early modern England. Rackham estimates that about 15 percent of England was wooded by the time of the Domesday Book (1086) (Hooke, *Landscape* 151). Early maps such as the Gough map (MS Gough Gen. Top. 16 Bodleian), denote only the largest. The Gough (ca. 1325-60) depicts with an entwined tree symbol the Forest of Dean, the New Forest, and Sherwood. In a survey of the “post-medieval spatial, temporal, functional, and cultural survival and

After centuries of deforestation and disafforestation, little virgin forest remained by the thirteenth century (Thomas 193). Despite the persistent popular belief in England's ancient greenwood, Della Hooke explains that woodland fell to field systems which "stretched for mile upon mile through open countryside" by Anglo-Saxon times, and that "there can have been little 'wilderness' that had not been drawn into the regional economy" (*Landscape* 139). In addition, the vacillating status of royal forests from the time of the Norman Conquest likely left a spotty landscape by early modern times. Keith Thomas believes that centuries of enclosing chases, dismantling parks, and generally neglecting forest administration meant the felling of woods and a vast reduction in the forest land Elizabeth inherited. He puts it bluntly: "It was not on Tower Hill that the axe made its most important contribution to English history" (193). The pressures of industry and war created more demand for resources from Elizabeth's administration, and deforestation continued under Tudor and Stuart reigns for the purposes of grazing, cultivation, building materials (especially ship building), and industries such as glass-making and ironworks (Thomas 193). A number of widespread developments inspired the perception that forests were coming to a quick demise. Standish warned James of the "generall destruction and waste of wood made within this your Kingdome, more within twenty or thirty last yeares than in any hundred yeares before" (1611, 1).¹⁷

The loss of forests threatened more than economic hardship, or a changing

significance" of forests in England, 1500-1850, Graham Jones acknowledges that scholars differ significantly on the number, names, and locations of purported forests. But estimates are relatively consistent. Historians estimate that by the thirteenth century one quarter of all England was composed of royal forests and under forest law (Thomas 200).

¹⁷ Rackham disputes the view that England was widely deforested, noting that "woods were among the most enduring and successful of all medieval institutions, and were remarkably resistant to the vicissitudes of the centuries" (77). Yet early modern people perceived what they believed was the beginning of the end of forests.

landscape, or military weakness; early modern fears of deforestation lie deeper. In an era in which England faced a plethora of external threats to the nation—Spanish armadas, a Scottish queen, Irish rebellions, and Continental counter-reformations—the threat of a domestic weakness was particularly disturbing. It was particularly disturbing, I think, not only because of the economic and military value of forest products, but because forests served as special spaces and tools for social negotiation, for creating and exercising power itself in the landscape. To lose forests and woodland would entail a loss of defining nobility and an institution closely tied to the social balance in the kingdom. What was to be done to save the forests, and who would do it?

Staking Claims: Woodland, Genre, and the Marginalized Aristocracy

At the very end of the sixteenth century and in the opening decade of the next, two writers propose a solution to the crisis of the forest, including what should be done and who should do it. John Manwood and Arthur Standish are keenly and personally aware of a disturbance in the forest. Manwood, a gamekeeper of Waltham Forest and a justice of the New Forest, wrote *A Breve Collection of the Lawes of the Forest* in 1592 to propagate understanding of forest laws because people no longer knew them, he claimed, and could “fal into the danger therof.”¹⁸ He saw his work as filling a need for a comprehensive volume that collected legitimate law to counter spurious opinions that were taking on the aura of law and leading to trespass (jv). *The Commons Complaint* (1611) was inspired by the 1607 Midlands Revolt, when Arthur Standish, deeply struck

¹⁸ The work was first published in 1598 under the title *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest*, followed by an expanded version in 1615. It was produced in four editions and reprinted until 1741. Manwood’s treatise was also included in abridged form in editions of Nicholas Cox’s *Gentleman’s Recreation* (1696). Subsequent quotations are from the 1615 edition unless otherwise indicated.

by the poverty behind the revolt, traveled the kingdom for four years in search of ways to ease commoners' discontent and avert further uprising.

Both writers mourn the disappearance of forests and woodland *and* the lack of action to prevent it, and they both desire to return England to its glorious green past. Yet they differ on how and by whose agency such a reversal can take place. Manwood recognizes the possibility of the demise of the forest, but for him, this demise will come not through deforestation, but because “forest lawes are growne cleane out of knowledge in most places in this land” (jv). For him, the forest is threatened with extinction not by the ax, but by declining knowledge of and respect for the law which defined royal forests. He focuses on the abstract and the symbolic aspects of the forest which subsequently protect the material forest. Standish, on the other hand, is concerned not with legality, but with materiality, not with shades of law, but with shady woods. The greatest danger to England's landscape and its people, he believes, lies in dearth resulting from the rising price of firewood and food—and, it goes unsaid, the social unrest that comes with dearth. He sidesteps the issue of royal forests and focuses on other forms of woodland, including hedges, coppices, private woodland, and wastes. And instead of pushing for a renewed knowledge of the laws of the king's forests, he urges renewed action on the part of the gentry to plant trees on public and private land.

John Manwood's *A Treatise on the Lawes of the Forest* concerns itself with royal forests and the codification of forest “law,” in actuality a collection of various forest practices, traditions, and received rules that Manwood means to legitimize in print. He purports to simply recite a body of laws that had been formerly understood yet which was fading from memory and dutiful practice. A special oath of loyalty and obedience

specific to forest dwellers, to which Manwood explains that every male 12 years of age or older living in the forest was required to swear, provides a general summary of Manwood's treatise at large. The oath, Manwood reports, was "accustomed and used in auncient time":

You shall true liege man be, vnto the kings Maiestie:
 You shall no hurt doe, vnto his beasts of the forest,
 Nor vnto any thing that doth belong thereto:
 The offences of other, you shall not conceale,
 But to the vttermost of your power, you shall them reueale
 Vnto the officers of the forest,
 Or to them that may see the same redrest.
 All these things you shall see done,
 So helpe you God at's holie doome. (249r)

The laws themselves, the details of which occupy the majority of the book, are circumscribed in lines 2-3: they protect the game and anything related to it, including its habitat.¹⁹ More importantly, the oath suggests a number of elements in Manwood's work cogent to this project: the characterization of the king as ultimate authority; a centralized forest administration; and the time-before-mind implications of pseudo-feudal duty and

¹⁹ Manwood enumerates four elements necessary to a forest: vert, venison, "particular lawes and priuiledges," and officers of administration (18v). Forest law had two prongs that applied to any person who lived or came within the forest bounds: restrictions to protect "venison" (all types of forest game) and restrictions to protect the "vert" (all plant life, including trees). Rules governed hunting within and outside forests, building, farming, grazing of livestock, felling of wood, capturing trespassers, and prosecuting and punishing offenders. Monarchs claimed exclusive hunting privileges, and all activities were regulated for the preservation of those privileges, even on privately held land. Editions of Manwood's treatise from 1615 on include a discussion of the various forest officials and courts necessary for the administration of forest law, as well as the purported "Carta de Foresta" of Canute and the forest charters of Henry III (ca. 1225) and Edward I (ca. 1306). See Richard Marienstras for a helpful summary of *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest*.

loyalty.²⁰ The rhetorical thrust of the oath is one of nostalgia, absolute monarchy, and elite exclusion that separates all subjects, all liegemen, from the monarch. The forest is the king's privilege, and that privilege takes precedence above all else, including private landownership.

As a pseudo-feudal holdover, the oath contrasts with the discourse of Manwood's work at large, the "law." Manwood places the oath at the end of his substantial treatise, and he seems to reproduce the oath as proof of the accepted notion of the king as liege lord of the forest, but also as a quaint curiosity. Its form as an oath and its feudal rhetoric place it in a social context of loyalty to local lords and a history of regional communities and power structures. In the body of Manwood's work, it is an afterthought buried in the dominant discourse, one that Manwood has painstakingly constructed and carefully justified: law.

As opposed to common law, established on practical precedence and explicated by Sir Edward Coke, the law Manwood codifies in his treatise is a particularly elite discourse in which the font and the beneficiary of the law was the monarch alone. Manwood's challenge is to shape a body of such laws into a coherent and authoritative collection and to justify it as legitimate in the face of disgruntled subjects, noble and common, who often felt that forest law impinged upon their "liberties" and conflicted with natural law (Grant 7). One prong of his approach is to build a concept of forest law as ancient, traditional, and irreversibly established in history, obscuring the machinations behind its formulation and enforcement.

²⁰ Marienstras observes that forests were merely "verbally protected" by word of law, not effectively guarded, and often infringed upon (34), suggesting that a special oath of loyalty and obedience specific to forest dwellers was apparently necessary.

Manwood does this by both diffusing the power that lies behind forest law *and* localizing it in the monarch. The royal forest tradition insisted on an almost mythical origin and claimed justification in niches and footholds here and there, like a spreading vine. For example, Manwood weaves together lore of William the Conqueror, arguments about “natural law,” and nostalgia for the forests of England’s past. The authority that justified royal forests was diffused throughout ideas of divine right, Nature, monarchy, tradition, and history, and that justification found embodied power in monarchy: forests are the right of the king not as an individual, but as an English prince. He safeguards the forests and all their symbolic significance as he safeguards his people and his beasts. Manwood’s trick lies in adroitly diffusing the authority which creates forests, making it omnipresent without dissolving it; when their foundational authority dissolves, forests cease to exist. The forest’s omnipresent power must be real enough to effect compliance.

As a writer, Manwood attempts to diffuse but not dissolve the forests’ aura in his text by removing both himself as “compiler” and the reigning monarch from center stage. He backs his treatise with “euen of the best & learnedest writers, approuing every argument by some lawfull authoritie” of “graue and learned mē” (ijr). When he mentions the monarch, he emphasizes the duty of kingship rather than the privileges and assigns its benefits to the people, the burden to the king. For both the people and the forests, the king is benevolent protector: “The king by his watch and diligent care doth defend and keepe every mans house in safetie: his labor doth maintaine and defend every mans rest and quiet: [...] for which case the Lawes doe attribute unto him all honor, dignitie, prerogative, and preheminance: which prerogatiue doth not onely extend to his owne

person, but also to all other his possessions, goods, and chattels beside”—including the forest (25r-v). Forest law grants the king privileges that trump common law and tradition.

Manwood also employs language to instill forests with an abstract authority. Throughout his work, he offers false etymologies for forest terms. He claims the “Latinists” created the word *foresta* from the two words *fera* and *statio*, suggesting “a safe abyding place for wild beasts” (32r). Aligning England with Rome, he offers a similar story for the English word:

And euen according to the same manner, imitating the Latinists, we have framed this English word, a Forest, being compounded of these two words, *For*, and *Rest*: And because a Forest is a safe abyding and priuiledged place for the kings wild beasts for rest, which words (*For* and *Rest*) being put together and made one word, is *Forrest*, for a Forest, taking his name of the nature of the place, which is priuiledged by the king for his wild beasts. (32r-v)

Forests are created by decree of the king, but justified in their “nature” as places of rest for the king’s beasts and the king himself, ostensibly in exchange for the private man’s rest. This forest is an extension of a social arrangement of protection and subservience, of power and deference mutually beneficial to king and subject.

Vital to a social understanding of the forest are the boundaries of the forest. *The Laws of the Forest* is obsessed with boundaries, yet Manwood’s definition and description of a forest hits upon a dilemma: no real, concrete, or defensible border separates the king’s forest from lesser land:

A forest is a certaine Territorie of wooddy grounds and fruitful pastures, priviledged for wilde beasts and foules of Forest, Chase, and Warren, to rest and abide in, in the safe protection of the king, for his princely delight and pleasure, which Territorie of ground, so priviledged, is meered and bounded with unremoveable, markes, meeres, and boundaries, either knownen by matter of record, or else by prescription. (18r-v)

“Unremoveable” refers to geographical landmarks such as streams and highways, but the deeper implication is of permanent privilege, power, and authority inherent in the forest itself and recognized by “record,” memory and tradition, or the “prescribed” force of arms, law, and administration. “And because a Forest doth likewise lie open and not inclosed, having onely but meeres and boundaries to know the Ring and uttermost Skirtes of the Forest” (19r), every man must make it a point to know where the boundaries lie, he emphasizes, and to voluntarily respect them. He frequently insists on the necessity of knowing exactly where boundaries lie; those boundaries mean the difference between the jurisdiction of royal forest law and common law, between a felony or a lawful take for a hunter, between a ruling of “accidental” death or murder for an overzealous enforcement officer, between regulation and liberty in the greenwood.

Knowingly or not, forest boundaries were easily traversed, and easily ignored. Manwood shows deep displeasure at what he sees as a general disrespect for boundaries (Marienstras 17). For example, he chastises: “And surely at this time it is a thing lamentable to behold and see, what stately and princely forests (that in the times past were accounted ornamēts unto a kingdome) are now cleane destroyed and spoiled: partly, because that the true meets and bounds of the forest are not knowne unto the officers of

the forest, and to others, as they ought to bee” (176r-v). Most frustrating to him is that purlieu (disafforested land on the borders of a royal forest) dwellers are not the only ones who disregard boundaries (they do hold an ambivalent status, he admits), but that Londoners come to hunt the purlieus too, “which is cleane contrarie to the lawes” (176v). Distinctions between legal, geographic, and social categories are blurred by the disregard shown forest boundaries and laws.

Fading distinctions seem to be a nagging fear and persistent problem: not that the boundaries are traversed, but that they are blurry, wavering, and unenforced. At the beginning of his treatise, Manwood confidently aims to make “it easie for any man, that will, yea euen at the sight and beholding thereof, hauing due consideration to every generalitie, particularitie, and difference therein, to see, as it were in a glasse before his face, what a Forest is” (18v). To know the forest is to know thyself. He expects that anyone, once acquainted with forest law, will recognize in his mind’s eye and in his surroundings a forest—what it is in form, extent, law, and significance—as easily as he knows his own face. The particularities and differences Manwood details, however, succeed in obscuring clarity and demonstrating that the boundaries and distinctions prescribed in the treatise are abstract, gray, and essentially changeable. An anxiety underlying Manwood’s work emerges in his concern over boundaries, for recognizing, accepting, and abiding boundaries of all types. He understands that the abstract and invisible boundaries described in forest law were the only lines dividing forest land from purlieus, private land, or commons. The other catch, of course, is that Manwood’s plan

relies on “any man, that will.”²¹ The danger was the potential dissolution of those boundaries in men’s minds. Any transgressing and trespassing of those all-important boundaries, geographic and social, meant infringements on land *and* status—a threatening dismissal of social distinctions.

Forest law codified a particularly stark social hierarchy. Social groups are defined with broad brush strokes, simplified to two groups: the monarch, and everyone else. R. P. Harrison notes, “an essential dimension of the king’s personhood belonged to the forest” (74), which is a symbolic topographic embodiment of exaltation and power. “The hunt was deeply intertwined in conceptions of royal prerogative itself” (Berry 5) as it completely subsumed all other land uses by all other people. Forest dwellers were restricted in their use of the land, even if they owned it, because any alteration to forest land was prohibited without the monarch’s permission. The justification for the monarch’s right to restrict private landowners’ activities in the forest was rooted in the past: Manwood suggests that landowners held their land by the grace of the king, since William I became the ultimate landlord. He also argues that animals of the hunt are by their rare and noble nature akin to gold and silver: suitable only for a king, and belonging to no one but him (25v). A forest is simply proper to the elevated power and privilege of the monarch, “‘set apart’ materially, legally, and symbolically” (Marienstras 25).

²¹ Purlieus are the best example of unclear and shifting boundaries. Manwood explains that purlieu are lands that were afforested when King John expanded the royal forests. When John capitulated to pressure from the nobles to disafforest them in the 1215 *Magna Carta*, and Henry III fulfilled the promise in 1225, they became something called purlieu, and landowners could once again build or plant on the land, hunt, and fell trees. But the animals, Manwood writes, had become accustomed to the enlarged boundaries, leading to the creation of purlieu rangers to drive them back out of the purlieu into the forest and special laws to allow them to flee into it (187v). For purlieus are not common land; they are literally and legally trapped between common or private land and the royal forest. Manwood attempts to explain: “... so that the woods and lands in the *Pourallee* were once absolutely *forest*, but now they are but cōdicionally in some sort *forest*” (172v). As some sort of forest, they are forest to all subjects except the landowner. Only he may hunt upon them, and the rules for his hunting are complex and restrictive.

Much scholarship on the cultural import of forests has taken this view—that of the monarchical potency embodied by and invested in the institution of the royal forest, of the king and the forest as symbiotic and exclusively set apart from other peoples and other lands. Both Richard Marienstras and R. P. Harrison draw parallels between the idea of forests as “sanctuary” in a “privileged space” (Manwood’s words) and the right of asylum. “The forest takes on the character of a sacred place,” writes Marienstras, where the game become “untouchable” by other men and the laws (20). Yet the opposite scenario plays out for trespassers. Poachers could be chased by forest officials and forest inhabitants raised by the “hue and cry”; if a trespasser was killed in the forest during pursuit, the death was not murder and the killer not held liable (Manwood 139r). R. P. Harrison notes the irony: The poacher “became an outlaw, a hunter turned quarry” (27). Such violence preserved the sanctuary and safety of the forest for the game and the king, and this topsy-turvy world had at its center the monarch. Marienstras writes: “The wild, the sacred, the right of protection and of hunting (that is to say, ritual killing), the legal space and the territorial space together form an articulated whole for which the king is at once guarantor, beneficiary, and emblem” (30).

But the emblematic king wasn’t the only Englishman in the forest and often wasn’t there in person at all; the presence of other people in the forest and the dynamics of forest politics made the royal forest a more complicated social tournament ground than a royalist view allows. In the later seventeenth century, for example, one part of Windsor Great Park, “the jewel in the crown of forest estates,” had an adult population of about 3,500 people living in villages in the royal forest (Beaver 92-93). Court cases there reveal conflicts with gentry and noblemen who poached the king’s game, “ambitious for the

honor and status ascribed to tokens of the hunt” (Beaver 99).²² So as much as Manwood’s treatise furthers an absolutist agenda, social conflict in the forest system and transgressed boundaries of legal space, social status, and behavior reveal the always wild nature of the forest itself. The forest was inhabited by everyday people whose immediate material needs were themselves quite compelling and landowners whose status and identity was tied to the land. For Manwood, whom Marienstrass labels as holding “the most absolutist tendencies of the Elizabethan world view” (18), the forest in legal theory presents a geographic and legal space which supports the distinctions drawn between people in the greater social hierarchy, specifically setting the monarch aside from all others. The forest in practice revealed the difficulty of such a vision.²³

Among those loath to be excluded, and whom Manwood attempts to elide in his treatise, are the noblemen who own lands in and near royal forests. In reserving the benefit of the forest, material and social (including the honor of the hunt), for the monarch alone, forest law reduces social rank to mere wealth. The treatise uses land value to draw distinctions among people, explaining, for example, that men owning lands of certain value could own certain types of hunting dogs and hunt with Crown permission. The burden of proof for hunting privileges becomes wealth, not nobility, and all hunters in the forest must supplicate for permission to hunt or make any changes to forest lands, including those they own. Unalienable nobility in the forest adheres to the monarch alone.

²² Venison was a meat of and for the nobility alone, legally available only to those of high rank allowed to hunt it, and not to be bought or sold. William Harrison complained in his 1587 *Description of England* that the protection of animals in forests and parks contributed to the starvation of common people (255-56).

²³ R. P. Harrison, on the other hand, claims that Manwood undertook his project “not so much because he was a monarchist but because he was a naturalist. Only the monarch, he thought, could save the wilderness from the ravages of human exploitation” (70).

This reduction of the nobility to petitioners, dependent upon Crown authorization, is compounded by their subjection to a system of law that finds its validating font not in tradition, the growing reputation of English common law, or understandings of “natural law,” but in the king himself. Formulated as “law” collected and codified in print by Manwood, forest restrictions in theory and practice work to exclude aristocracy, superseding traditional, recognized patterns of inherited nobility and land-based social status and power. Couched in familiar concepts of allegiance, duty, service, deference, and a feudal social contract, forest law builds on the authority of tradition and history yet claims exclusivity in forest spaces through the application of an emergent discourse of “law” as absolute authority. Forest law uniquely links law to the absolute monarch, thereby excluding all else. And while lower ranks seem content to observe forest law (on the surface at least) as long as it accommodated traditional rights of common, noble landowners lost to forest law more than material advantage, but a measure of nobility itself.

Marienstras writes, “[Manwood’s] treatise is a kind of legal-cum-ideological poem, putting forward a particular vision and theory where forestry law and the forest were concerned” (17). That ideology looks to the past; Manwood’s work is one of nostalgia, even as he is aware that he fights a losing battle as economic pressures and new ideas about land use tempt monarchs like Elizabeth to farm out royal forests. First circulated in the same year Elizabeth considered A. B.’s proposal, *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest* grounds its authority in a law that subsumes long-established English traditions and social arrangements and thereby envisions a future of English forests that preserves the imagined glory of the past. The language of law—the perambulations (legal

descriptions based on inspections on foot) which describe forest boundaries, the proclamations of the Crown, and now Manwood's treatise itself—became the shaky foundation on which the forest institution stood. Of course, the forest was patrolled by authorized officials, buttressed by specialized administrative and legal systems, and infused by antiquity. But as forest law creates strong centralized control of the nation's forests, it excludes a powerful segment of the social hierarchy that competed with the Crown for political power and control. Thirteen years after the first publication of *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest*, Arthur Standish, motivated by social instability, wrote a manual to encourage people of the humbler ranks to appropriate England's woodland.

If Manwood's project is theoretical and abstract in its legal nature, Standish's is practical and down-to-earth, literally. In 1611's *The Commons Complaint*, Standish is careful not to touch upon royal forests, but he figuratively grasps at every bit of woodland outside them, instructing landowners to get their hands dirty planting trees, raising fowl, exterminating vermin, and preserving their grain from pigeons. *The Commons Complaint* urges widespread efforts to plant trees to ease two "speciall grievances": "the general destruction and waste of Woods" and the "extreame dearth of Victuals" (1611:1). Standish connects these problems in an early formulation of what might be called an ecosystem, a network of interdependent natural processes: livestock feed on hay and crop byproducts, they fertilize next year's planting, and the crops and firewood feed the human masters who drive agricultural activity. Kept in balance, this system provides food for all; knocked out of balance, as Standish claims a scarcity of firewood has done

(forcing people to burn hay and dung), it ends in dearth and the inferno with which I began this chapter.

The suggestion of an interdependent natural system is as theoretical as Standish gets in *The Commons Complaint*; the work is a practical handbook concerned not with the legal status or symbolic value of woodland, but the practical actions landowners could take to increase wood and crop production. He prescribes planting fruit trees and other seedlings on private land, hedgerows, sheep walks, and commons, laying out the methods to use and the yields a planter could expect per acre. By the 1613 edition, Standish abandons the fowl and vermin schemes and focuses entirely on the pressing problem of wood scarcity. He focuses on private and common woodland, and not on game, but on wood as critical to the survival of England and to its “posterity,” a favorite word. Andrew McRae claims *The Commons Complaint* triggers “a significant cultural watershed” (135), and Rackham calls it a new direction in agriculture as the beginning of English forestry (in the sense of woodland plantation and management) as a perceivable tradition (92). Standish’s rhetorical emphasis on futurity directly counters Manwood’s reliance on the aura of antiquity, and the justification for his work lies in England’s present and imperial future, *if* the nation takes care of its woods.

Standish’s instructional manual espouses in its plan to rescue England’s woodland a view of social agency that alters the balance of who controls the kingdom’s land and its future. His proposed recovery program is characterized by two elements that oppose it to Manwood’s: the emergence of the individual landowner as protector of the kingdom—exemplified by Standish himself—and a gaze that turns from antiquity to posterity. Showing the influences of Protestant individualism, the economic valuation of timber and

“natural resources,” and the suggestion of profit for personal and patriotic benefit, *The Commons Complaint* in all its permutations advances a forest strategy that relieves both the monarch and nobility of active participation.

The manual begins with a humble plea to “the Kings most Excellent Maiestie” for his support of the project Standish has undertaken. He blames idle and neglectful “destroyers” for the wood shortage and opens with a statement absolving the king of any implied blame, instead crediting him with preserving any hope of recovery: “Little respect is taken but by your Maiesty, for the posterity and prosperity of your Kingdom” (1611:1). He does not present the king’s game preserves as fair game for solving the wood shortage problem, despite the widespread sentiment that the strictures of royal forests created undue hardship for those living in or near them and the association of noble sport hunting with profligate waste.²⁴ He merely asks the king’s blessing for his plan to encourage subjects to be as provident and responsible as he praises the king to be.

He successfully gains royal clout in 1613, when James I responds with approbation in the form of his written endorsement and seal. The editions immediately following boast on the title page of the king’s encouragement (1613) and authorization (1614 and 1616), and Standish glows in his 1613 introduction that he is “the better animated by his Maiestie” (1613: A3r). Undeniably, the monarch’s endorsement infuses the work with an authority and regality that sets Standish’s work apart from other

²⁴ In the only other work attributed to him in addition to *The Lawes of the Forest*, Manwood suggests waste land lying unused in the king’s forests, parks, and chases be leased to yeomen to be converted to arable land for the king’s profit. “Manwood’s Project for improving the Land Revenue, by inclosing Wastes” was supposedly presented to James I’s Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Julius Caesar April 27, 1609, but not published until it was included as an appendix to John St. John’s 1787 *Observations on the Land Revenue of the Crown*.

husbandry treatises available to industrious landowners.²⁵ But unlike Manwood's discussion of forests, in which the monarch is an omnipresent shadow, Standish's vision of England's forests depends on a different figure that shakes itself free of the king after the first few pages. Departing from the king's royal "we" and the heavily passive voice in James I's endorsement of *The Commons Complaint* is an active individual who looks forward to an English prosperity based not on tradition and antiquity, but national might rooted in husbandry, not hunting.

Standish himself becomes that representative figure. While Manwood as writer retreated behind a legal team of "graue and learned mē" (ijr), Standish takes center stage as his work finds success. He is named on the title page of the 1613 edition as having "invented" the work, and further editions specify "By Arthur Standish." Most striking are commendatory poems in the 1612 and 1614 editions that create in the work's author an English hero. Henry Peacham (1576-1643), who would go on to write *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), composed a short verse to open the 1612 edition of Standish's work. "Vpon the Author and his most commendable and necessarie worke" is predictably effusive in its classical allusions and exalted praise; it is more interesting in its invoking of the animating spirit of Britain and reference to recent national imperialistic heroes. The humility topos of the first stanza insists that words cannot enhance Standish's accomplishments any more than garlands could beautify Flora, but classical hyperbole gives way in the second stanza to a national one. The second and final stanza reads:

But lo! the Genius of faire Brittain by,

²⁵ See, for example, Rooke Church's 1612 *An Olde Thrift Newly Revived. Wherein is Declared the Manner of Planting, Preserving, and Husbanding yong Trees of diuers Kindes for Timber and Fuell*. Incidentally, Church's work argues for enclosing decayed royal forests.

*Commands me speake, to give thee thy desert,
Who art so carefull of posteritie,
And present times unru'd of greater part:
Swearing by Thames her hopes are more by Standish
Then all the gold she got by Drake or Candish [sic].*

The generative spirit of Britain insists upon praising Standish, and that praise ranks a country gentleman schooled in husbandry above the noble explorers Sir Francis Drake and Sir Thomas Cavendish.²⁶ Peacham transfers the fate of England's future from the powerful nobleman at court and at sea to the innovative landowner who tends his groves at home, just as Standish appropriates effective control over the wooded landscape for the everyday country gentleman.

In the 1614 version, longer poems by Arthur Hopton and Richard Brathwaite precede the preface and present Standish as England's own Saturn and a patron of woodmen, as an authority whose wisdom and care has preserved the kingdom from danger and elevated its glory. Hopton, a mathematician and composer of almanacs and the occasional commendatory poem, writes of the state of woodland resurrected by Standish's efforts: "Those spacious woods" (36) ...

Being now cut downe, consum'd, and wasted all,
By Spend all's, Scape-thriftes, and the Prodigall,
Are here replanted and renew'd againe,
By such conceits that *Standish* late did gaine. (41-44)

²⁶ Standish (fl. 1552-1615) claimed descent from the Standish family of Lancashire and seemed familiar with Standish Hall (Thirsk).

The lines emphasize a dramatic turnabout enabled by Standish's knowledge of planting. His labor has resurrected the wasted land, and he (not the king) alone in a sea of irresponsible men has saved it from blight. Like Manwood, Hopton emphasizes revival; this revival is not of old law, however, but of the woodland itself, saved by new knowledge. The damning accusations against "Spend alls" and the like, figures of greed and profligacy, implicate a self-indulgent aristocracy who fells and sells timber, or, at the least, reserves their woods for a recreational sport that benefits only themselves.

Brathwaite's hyperbolic poem states outright that "*Standish is Saturne*" (14), drawing from classical literature to compare Standish's work to Saturn's civilizing of the primordial forests and barren lands where Rome would arise.²⁷ He quickly retreats into a native pastoral whimsy, however, beckoning to his husbandmen readers:

Come then yee Wood men decke his siluer haire,
 (Emblemes of age) with chaplets of renowe,
 That hee whtch [sic] now vnto your Lawnes repaires,
 May glory much in what your selues have done,
 Shewing those Trophies that by you are showne
 To all succeeding times, that we may say
 Our naked fields haue got a new array. (22-28)

Brathwaite credits woodmen, led by the fatherly Standish, for the accomplishment of a green and clothed England, for correcting the shame of prodigality and a vulnerable, naked land. Standish becomes the patron they adorn with garlands, and trees are the trophies that counter the mere gold of Drake and Cavendish and stand as Standish's

²⁷ See R. P. Harrison's discussion of the Saturn episode in the *Aeneid* (50-51).

living legacy to England. Perhaps at a time when James I's lavish spending and budgetary problems provoke increased forest fines and fees, foreign-made trinkets flood London markets, and the specter of a cash economy seems to threaten traditional social relationships, a treasure of English timber is safe and preferable to gold (at least in Braithwaite's and Hopton's laudatory poems). Individual landowners—woodmen in Braithwaite's pastoral vision—are credited with the careful preservation of England; they have taken its future in their hands and appropriated the forests by planting their own.²⁸

In effect Standish appropriates from the king control over England's wooded landscape and the "posterity" dependent on the fruits of that landscape; he makes royal forests irrelevant, not merely to his discussion of woodland, but to England's future. He relieves the king of blame, of responsibility, and of a central role in English woodland. While Manwood aims to reinvigorate the laws of the forest, for which the king is the centripetal center, and make them once again relevant to England's national strength and identity, Standish's text accomplishes the opposite and implies a dismissal of the noble authority that controls land.

But of course, *The Commons Complaint* was a rhetorical coup, not an actual one. James I, an avid hunter, maintained firm control of royal forests. He attempted to re-enforce forest laws, placed more stringent stipulations on hunting, and issued irritated proclamations against forest abuses. Standish's treatise is also directed primarily toward the gentry—those who owned land—and not the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, the laborers, peasants, and landless poor. The debate represented by *A Treatise of the Lawes*

²⁸ See McRae for a full account of how "the individualist farmer was metamorphosed from a covetous canker on the body politic into a godly man of thrift and industry [and] the meaning of agrarian England shifted accordingly from a site of manorial community and moral economy toward a modern landscape of capitalist enterprise" (7).

of the Forest and *The Commons Complaint* is not so much about trees, but about the role of the social ranks—or more accurately, the Crown versus its subjects—in determining the course of the nation and its landscape. As a debate about ownership that goes beyond legal possession of land, it entails a sense of personal investment and a personal role in the kingdom and its future.

Excluded from these books' visions of the future of the iconic English landscape is the aristocracy. The nobility finds itself squeezed out on one side by Crown tendencies toward absolutism and an unassailable body of law that trumps traditional land-based claims to status and honor, and on the other side by an emerging ethic of profitable land improvement championed by industrious gentry landowners who are motivated by personal and national gain. Noblemen find themselves dependent upon royal favor in pursuing the noble sport of the hunt, and implicated by some men below them in antiquated, wasteful practices of self-indulgence. Furthermore, personal participation in the mercantile aspects of land development directly opposes the virtue of nobility that highborn men drew from their land. W. Harrison sneers at men of high rank who sell their estates' resources or "deal with suchlike affairs as belong not to men of honor but rather to farmers or graziers; for which such, if there be any, may well be noted (and not unjustly) to degenerate from true nobility and betake themselves to husbandry" (255).

Veiled accusations of vainglory and tension with the Crown over forest lands were nothing new, of course, and noblemen likely felt little loss of honor. They continued the traditions of the hunt that signified membership in an elite group and combined concepts of blood, land, and honor in a definition of nobility. People of lesser rank continued to emulate their practices, legally or illegally, in pursuit of the same social

cachet. Lords continued to profit from their forested lands, selling timber and developing glass and coal industries (with Crown consent). The aristocracy remained a formidable political, economic, and social force, of course.

Culturally, the literary forest retained noble shadings, making the forest a fitting space for the social debate about agency in England's future. Romance, pastoral, and epic genres figure forests as places that test and reveal high-born virtue and honor. Royal forests and the nobility of the hunt infused historical forests with aristocratic aura. As a space so identified with the strength of the land, the honor of its leaders, and the imagination of its writers, the forest is a charged space for debate. R. P. Harrison bases his study of the forests of Western civilization on a belief in their paradoxical nature and the idea of shadows, arguing that forests represent the negative, the opposing, and the antagonistic side of social institutions (62-63). For example, to the Church, they were places of dark evil and lost souls but also places where sage hermits could escape the temptations of civilization, and the law saw them as harboring outlaws, but these outlaws often represented just resistance to a corrupt institution. He writes, "Forests have a way of destabilizing and even reversing the terms that would place them on either side of an imaginary dichotomy" (62).²⁹ The competing forces that emerge in the forests in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England are those of social class, and works that interrogate social class and are also attracted to the forest extend well beyond the treatises I have explored. I would like to borrow from R. P. Harrison another imperative: "Our concern is to narrate a 'poetic history' which has its basis in empirical and cultural history but which cannot be reduced to either" (92). There existed a common currency of

²⁹ Similarly, Laurel Moffatt figures the woods in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a Foucauldian heterotopia.

forest issues and language that speaks to the way forests themselves spoke to early modern English people. Poets of the age found in the imaginative space of the forest a medium by which to explore the complexities and possibilities of social status and change. The remainder of this project examines this poetic engagement.

Chapter Two: Dukes of the Wood: Nobility in the Forests of Shakespearean Comedy

The Forest on the London Stage: A Cultural Geography of Wildness

While John Manwood and Arthur Standish presented plans for English forestland that markedly excluded aristocratic interests, the aristocracy went about its business as landowners and regional lords. The nobility owned great tracts of land, including woodland in which noblemen constructed hunting parks in imitation of royal forests, squabbled with villagers and tenants over rights and privileges, and conducted lucrative industrial endeavors such as coal or glass production. Despite the growing divide between Crown and aristocracy and early efforts at agrarian improvement driven by the lower gentry, noblemen maintained a comfortable foothold in the forest. The nobility also proliferate in popular literature: knights and ladies roam the forests deep of chivalric romance, highborn persons in lowly disguises enjoy pastoral adventures, and London playwrights ask audiences to imagine dense woodland through which dukes stroll. Forests engage the sociopolitical as well as the mythological and imaginative force of space. This chapter examines a literary representation of nobility in two of William Shakespeare's forest comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) and *As You Like It* (1599), and it begins with a simple question: What happens to dukes in the forest?³⁰

These two plays examine the relationship between woodland spaces and their noble occupants; forests are central in both comedies to expressions of and claims to authority recognized by both those who reign over and those who occupy space. In addition to the confused identities, rustic entertainments, and obligatory marriages, each

³⁰ Another comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, includes a duke who enters the forest in pursuit of his lovesick daughter. The Duke of Milan reconciles with his banished future son-in-law and pardons a band of outlaws there, but he is not closely identified with the forest space, and the play does not interrogate his authority. The other of the four forest comedies, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, is purely plebeian in cast.

play features a duke who enters the forest, hunting scenes, encounters between the nobility and commons, supernatural beings, and a characterization of the forest as a space that makes resolution possible. Both plays feature noblemen whose recognized authority is compromised and a natural space that acts as or represents a powerful entity in negotiating power balances among different groups. Both dukes invoke a sense of nostalgia for the imagined comforts of a not-so-distant past, for beneficent local rule, for authority that can establish peace in the midst of wild human and nonhuman nature. And both dukes rely on the setting of the forest to authorize their status and power.

The question of how dukes and forests define each other is one of cultural geography, having to do with issues of social rank, authority, and legitimacy as connected to a specific landscape. It encompasses two of the important contexts to my examination of these plays: social status and the historical forest. The title “duke” is itself somewhat ambiguous in both historical and literary contexts.³¹ The military force, land, resources, and loyalty that dukes commanded in medieval times through the early Tudor dynasty made dukes powerful regional lords, and many dukes were of immediate relation—uncles, cousins, and brothers—to the monarch. Their power was enough to unking kings in times past and persuade the Tudors to chip away at the strength of the nobility out of a sense of self-preservation. Yet in a society of fealty to lords and in the markedly changing social dynamics of early modern England, as the monarch became more and more socially distanced from all subjects, a duke is *not* a king. Most commentators of these

³¹ The title of duke is second only to a king in the sociopolitical hierarchy. However, Oliver Rackham records that some dukes who controlled palatine regions held complete sway over even royal forests in their lands. Enfield, for example, was a legal forest belonging to the Duke of Lancaster, who clashed with tenants in the sixteenth century over common rights to timber—a dispute which dragged on for about 250 years (177-78). Lancashire was one of the three English counties with palatine status, meaning that their nobility owed allegiance to the king but exercised autonomy in their lands. (The other two counties are County Durham and Cheshire.)

plays, however, grant the resident duke unlimited scope, viewing him as a ruling monarch within the constraints of the story. Others point to the suitability of the title of duke to Shakespeare's purposes: unencumbered by the care and responsibility of a kingdom, a duke makes for a better (and politically safer) comic protagonist than a king.³² I choose to take Shakespeare at his word, viewing Theseus and Senior as dukes, as men of the highest nobility with close regional relationships to ancestral lands, including forests, and owed allegiance to a greater authority. The perceivable presence of greater authorities—forces that undermine and overrule ducal status and power—support this stance.

The literary forest has been thoroughly traversed in a body of criticism that has fleshed out the psychological, metaphorical, and allusive valences of wooded spaces, yet has for the most part declined to examine literary forests in relation to historical ones. For example, despite such specific, identifiable places as the forest of Arden, Robert K. Presson's assertion about the forest of *As You Like It* sums up traditional critical opinion: "Arden in reality is no place, but a very fine and necessary idea" (15). Yet Arden is and was a historical place that in its material and cultural significance bears heavily upon the "idea of Arden" in *As You Like It*.³³ This essay considers the early modern chase (an unenclosed hunting park) in relation to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the forest of Arden in Warwickshire as a gloss to *As You Like It*.

The third contextual touchstone in this essay might be called the theater as forest.

³² For example, although he assumes all dukes are "heads of state" in Shakespeare's plays, Curtis B. Watson writes, "In short, the Duke usually leaves the impression of a sort of elderly Renaissance gentleman" (37). Clifford Leech claims all dukes in Shakespeare's comedies are "sovereign rulers" but that the playwright felt more comfortable avoiding the loaded titled of "king" in a comic work (101).

³³ Swapan Chakravorty mentions two forests of similar names in France as well as the forest of Arden in Warwickshire, England (163).

Of course, woodland settings have been central to the staging of both plays for more than 400 years. Dorothea Kehler's survey on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* touches on elaborate Restoration and eighteenth-century stagings, Beerbohm Tree's 1911 production with live rabbits, and Peter Hall's 1959 staging at Stratford-upon-Avon, in which he set the play on an Elizabethan estate (53-54). The historical forest shares with traditional humanist interpretations of literary forests one characteristic, wildness, that connects it in unexpected ways to a locus of urban wildness, the public theaters. Extensive scholarly work has examined the socially marginal and subversive nature of theater in early modern London.³⁴ This wildness takes many forms (crime, licentiousness, violence, social transgression, and general insobriety) associated with unruly behavior and people in theaters and forests. Both spaces harbor latent disorder, and in many ways, theaters imported the wildness of the wood into the city (or the Liberties, at least). The birth of the Globe Theater cogently illustrates the point.

The dismantling of the Theater and its resurrection as the Globe in 1599 invokes contemporary controversies about the appropriate use of natural resources, the nature of actors and the theater enterprise, and the forest. S. Schoenbaum relates the angry dispute between the Lord Chamberlain's Men and Giles Allen, owner of the land on which their playhouse, the Theatre, stood in 1598. Having raised rents and then demanded that use of the building revert to him after five years, Allen planned "to pull down the same, and to

³⁴ See, for example, Steven Mullaney's work on the location of London's theaters in the Liberties, lying outside the jurisdiction of the London authorities, and Jean E. Howard's study of theater-going itself as subversive by design. Howard notes how the market principles of selling seats disrupted standards of social status and gender. She writes, "While the public theaters were hierarchically designed to reflect older status categories (common men in the pits; gentlemen in the galleries; lords on the very top), in actuality one's place at the public theater was determined less by one's rank than by one's ability or willingness to pay for choice or less choice places. Money thus stratified the audience in ways at least potentially at odds with older modes of stratification" (69).

convert the wood and timber thereof to some better use” (207). When Richard Burbage protested, Allen revoked the company’s lease. To circumvent the loss of the Theatre itself, the Burbages, their carpenter Peter Street, and a dozen workers dismantled the structure itself in Allen’s absence (206-07). The timber was then transported across the Thames and used to build the Globe.³⁵

Allen’s subsequent angry diatribe against the (supposedly legal) actions of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men closely resembles descriptions of forest rioters and night hunters who poached deer and broke park pales. The Burbages’ men, Allen said in his complaint, did

riotously assemble themselves together and then and there armed themselves with divers and many unlawful and offensive weapons, as namely, swords, daggers, bills, axes, and such like [...] then and there pulling, breaking, and throwing down the said Theatre in very outrageous, violent and riotous sort, to the great disturbance and terrifying not only of your subjects, said servants and farmers, but of divers others of your Majesty’s loving subjects there inhabiting. (qtd. in Schoenbaum 208)

Allen figures the Lord Chamberlain’s Men as rioters, unlawfully raiding his land of the wood on it and disturbing the queen’s subjects. His language approximates that used in Star Chamber documents to describe poaching suspects as ““very dissolute, riotous and unruly persons, common nightwalkers and stealers of deer out of the forests, chases and parks’ of the queen,” employing the same adjectives often used in complaints against playhouses and playgoers (Fitter 206-07). “In the culture wars of the late sixteenth

³⁵ This story is also related by James Shapiro in *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*.

century, poaching culture and theater culture disreputably overlap,” Chris Fitter writes (207). The space of the theater, in both its timber construction and reputation for disorder, held strong affinities with the space of the forest.

Together, the forest and the stage open imaginative possibilities in which characters and audiences can examine the relationship between society, stripped of its strictures and trappings, and nature. The ambiguous forests of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It* constitute a particularly intensified representation of transformative space, rife with social possibilities. Power latent within the forest could manifest itself in many forms, material and social, including progress and empire or resistance and change. And as Mary Bly asserts, “Theaters are extraordinarily efficient vehicles for turning landscape into a cultural product” (66). The portrayal of authority, including its sources, exercise, and transfer, within the staged forest, then, holds tremendous potency.

Despite the raucousness of the theater and the forest space depicted on its wooden boards, these two particular plays feature quiet contemplative moments that interrogate deep-seated ideas about the relationship between the forest and powerful figures. Anne Barton has described *As You Like It* as “singularly still at the centre” (Introduction 400), referring to its relative lack of action and perhaps to those many moments in which characters pause to muse, meditate, and reflect upon their changed circumstances at that moment, in that place. Despite its busy plot, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* also has its moments of stillness. This essay examines a few of these moments in the wood in both plays: Duke Senior’s musings on “these woods” of Arden, Oberon’s explanation of his own nature, and Theseus’s pause in the pre-dawn quiet to reminisce before his hunt in the

palace wood. Those moments of stillness, when the forest setting is not a backdrop to action but an inhabited place and a present entity, become key to examining the relationship between characters—here, dukes—and the places they not only inhabit, but over which they claim authority. Here we glimpse, in a scrutiny veiled by comedy, dukes “on trial as rulers” (Leech 110) and forests as presiding authorities.

So the simple question—what happens to dukes in forests?—encompasses a number of ancillary queries: What role does the forest itself play in a “forest comedy”? How do dukes and forests define each other? How do forest spaces infuse authority in resident nobles, and vice versa? How does wildness confuse or disrupt agency and power? What is the role of landownership in forest spaces? Finally, what happens to dukes in *staged* forests?

Both these plays suggest through the chaos and restoration of comedy a reciprocal exchange of authority between land and the lord who claims it. Duke Theseus hunts in his palace wood in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, yet while his explicit and implicit presence infuses it with authority, he remains comically unaware of a greater force at work there that dictates his government to him and underwrites his naturalized authority. His perceived control over other characters and space infuses the wood with the authority of order gained by military might and justified by a social hierarchy deemed to be *of nature*. But even as he demonstrates his dominance over people and animals in the wood, his authority is simultaneously undercut by a fairy forester-king.

In *As You Like It*, the exiled Duke Senior is humbled, one noble lady purchases land, and another cross-dresses to direct the events of the play. Confusion is brought to order by the forest of Arden, a space closely associated with a celebrated English past.

Duke Senior garners authority *from* it, receiving its sanction before the benefice of the forest returns him, ennobled by hardship and reauthorized in his role as kind and just nobleman, to the court where he belongs. As if heeding Touchstone's words to "Let the forest judge," Arden restores normative gender and class roles that will prevail *outside* the forest. In this way the forest supports a social structure capped by a legitimized aristocracy, yet within the contentious wood, characters discover a socially destabilizing space that denies exclusive authority to the highborn and enables a degree of freedom from the limitations of degree.

In these plays, negotiations of authority between the low and the high, the land and its inhabitants reveal the ultimate contingency of noble authority on the will of greater, often uncontrollable, forces. Yet admittedly, both plays are conservative in their conclusions, maintaining or even restoring the status quo of social stratification and power. Elliot Krieger challenges critics who claim "an absence of social problems" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, and he observes a note of "fantasy, wish-fulfillment, and improbability in the dramatic resolution" which "dramatizes the aristocratic fantasy of, and strategy for, creating complete social poise" (67). The wildness of the night in Theseus's palace wood shows that such social control is not only impossible, but unnatural. Yet an assumption that the aristocracy maintains control or that "the forces of nature certify and bless the aristocratic predominance and autonomy" (Krieger 69) neglects the looming forest, always associated with disorder and in these two plays harboring authority that denies the nobility full control. Attention to historical forests and their imprint on these forest comedies leads to a balanced view of the social impulses—conservative, yet changing—explored in the palace wood and forest of Arden.

The differing ways the two dukes relate to the forests, or vice versa, offer a hint to the fluid process of social change and the local (as in *locus*) basis on which such change could be imagined (if not yet politically effected) in early modern England.

Tenuous Authority and the “Palace Wood” of A Midsummer Night’s Dream

A Midsummer Night’s Dream makes it immediately clear that Duke Theseus wields stern authority in Athens. The play opens in the city with Theseus boasting of his martial prowess in marital affairs to one who knows all too well, his newly conquered queen Hippolyta. But the demands of the state interrupt him as he speaks of their upcoming wedding of “pomp, with triumph, and with reveling” (1.1.19): Egeus needs Theseus’s judgment to resolve the matter of his daughter’s competing suitors. The duke approaches the problem of Hermia’s marriage—a problem expressed in terms of authority and property—with an assured air of righteousness and a personal comfort with harshness. Athens is his domain.

But the venue quickly changes. By the end of Act 1, scene 1 of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the wood outside Athens has been established as the central setting of the play, and ten characters make plans to meet there come nightfall. Lysander and Hermia defy “the sharp Athenian law” (1.1.162) that denies their wishes to marry, arranging to meet in the wood a league out of town. They first mention the wood, followed by Hermia’s reference to it as the place she and Helena shared girlish confidences (1.1.214-215) and Helena’s intention to direct Demetrius there (1.1.247). In the following scene, Quince and his cast of five players also agree to meet in the wood—now specified as the “palace wood”—that night to rehearse their entertainment in private and keep their

“devices” unknown (1.2.101-104). Theseus and Hippolyta hunt in the wood in the morning. Already there in residence are the kingdoms of the fairy king and queen, Oberon and Titania.

The conflicts of love and law are worked out in this setting, not Athens, and the wood itself becomes an authoritative space where the interests of various parties receive the attention both of the play’s internal authorities, Theseus and Oberon, and its diverse external theater audience. As the play’s rulers direct the lives of their subjects, its theater audience may take a cue from the wryly critical viewers of the mechanicals’ play, “A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / And his love Thisby; very tragical mirth” (5.1.56-57), and, encouraged to see and interpret contradictions, pass judgment on the competence of those who claim authority in Shakespeare’s play. What they ultimately find is that Theseus’s assured self-confidence may not be justified. The entitlement with which Theseus views his private wood and the authority he attempts to enact in it only underscore the ironic tenuousness of an elite status subject to greater forces.

Most commentators understand Theseus as English, but many severely demote him from a duke to an innocuous country squire; others view the duke as an absolute sovereign.³⁶ These characterizations miss the mark; views of the duke’s place and power can be partially corrected through a reexamination of his woodland space and its historical counterpart. Theseus’s habit of hunting, though certainly not exclusive to

³⁶ Although the play takes place in Athens and its environs, critics have long commented on its Englishness. For example, Angela Carter makes that case that Shakespeare’s wood is nowhere near Greece but represents a forest in the English midlands (Holland 172 n. 41-2). G. K. Chesterton beams, “Shakespeare’s description of Athens is the best description of England that he or any one else ever wrote,” adding that the mechanicals are surely English, as are the fairies, and Theseus is “only an English squire, fond of hunting, kindly to his tenants, hospitable with a certain flamboyant vanity” (19). David Young also sees Theseus as an extension of Chaucer’s version of the character, a gentle sponsor of country festivities (17-18).

English culture, invokes a sense of Englishness and suggests medieval military exercise: hunting was traditionally considered good practice for the strategic and physical challenges faced by knights in battle. His own warrior-knight-hunter concept of self suggests as much. The wood itself bears the marks of the medieval and early modern passion for the hunting park. Theseus's call for his forester, his use of dogs, and his ostensibly recreational hunts suggest that his palace wood is not the wild "waste" of romance, but more likely that imitation of the English royal forest, the private chase.

A chase was an unenclosed, privately owned hunting park.³⁷ Widely established throughout England by noble men wanting to enjoy the noble sport of the hunt, parks and chases were coveted status symbols for the high born as well as exclusive sources of a steady meat supply. Noble parks and chases could be built with the Crown's permission and only when not in proximity to a royal forest. The palace wood resembles such a space. At first glance, Theseus seems to loom over his palace wood, and his explicit and implicit presence infuses the forest with noble authority. Lacking even a proper name, the wood holds no identity outside its relationship to him and his palace, and the "Duke's oak" (1.2.110) figures as the one identifiable landmark in the wood.³⁸ It is presumably Theseus's legal possession; unlike royal forests, which were often the private property of landowning nobility but the prerogative of the monarch, the palace wood is represented

³⁷ Unlike the open expanse of a chase, Athens itself may be thought of as an enclosure. Alexander Leggatt notes that "To break out of Athens is to break out of an enclosure" (195), citing the city gates mentioned by Lysander (1.1.213).

³⁸ Werner Habicht discusses the various functions of the ubiquitous tree property on the Elizabethan stage, including its role in visually specifying locality, but more importantly, its emblematic operation as paired with a play's language, themes, and structure. He notes that tree props were most certainly available, noting Henslowe's record of a golden apple tree (76), and their flexibility allowed them to represent everything from the single landmark tree, a forest space, or the Garden of Eden. The stage tree, he writes, evoked "familiar motifs established by iconographic and literary traditions, the sheer multiplicity and disparity of which account for its ambiguous effects" (81).

entirely by its aristocratic owner. Theseus's relationship with the wood illustrates the powerful connotations forest land absorbed from the upper social classes who controlled them. When he and Hippolyta hunt there, he exercises more than the legal right to hunt, but an aristocratic prerogative deeply expressive of social status and privilege. A sense of nostalgia (aided in part by the exploits of the English fairies) emanates from Theseus and suggests the benevolent and noble local lord, present on his land, accessible to his subjects, and capable of ordering nature and society. As he manages the lives of his subjects at the end of the play and grants legal blessings on Oberon's love arrangements, his noble airs inform the palace wood, imbuing it with his own authority.

Of course, the activity of recreational hunting itself implies an elite privilege, yet Theseus's physical presence alone is enough to claim and apply authority. Leah Marcus discusses settings and locality in her study of Stuart monarchs' use of the pastoral vision and rural entertainments as extensions of royal power. She discusses James I's and Charles I's attempts to stem the aristocracy's migration to the urban court, which they felt created an antagonistic divide between nobles and commons, by frequent proclamations to "Get thee to the country." Such orders and the support of pastoral pastimes "imprinted royal power on the rural landscape," Marcus writes (19). Theseus, as local lord, has imprinted his authority on his locale. Looming above the palace wood is the Duke's oak, where Quince directs his cast to "do it in action as we will do it before the Duke" (3.1.5-6). The duke is present in the imagination of the players and represented by the celebrated English oak. As a duke, a localized title versus an itinerant king of an entire realm, Theseus is already closely identified with his city and its environs, and his physical and symbolic presence in his chase implies an extensive authority and pervasive

presence in the imaginative and literal English landscape.

Conversely, Theseus's wood lends him a considerable degree of authority. He is a beneficiary of both the tradition of hereditary nobility and a tradition that situates nature as the book of God, in which God's glory is made manifest.³⁹ A number of passages in Psalms are used to support a reading of nature as voicing God's glory, including, as

David Kinsley points out (116), Psalms 96.11-12:

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;

Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof;

Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein:

Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice. (*Holy Bible*)⁴⁰

As nature celebrates God's glory, its commendation can also be extended to those believed to hold dominion over nature in a divinely endorsed "natural" social hierarchy. The idea of the book of nature allows Theseus a circuitous justification for his political position, landownership, and sport hunting. First, he serves as a conduit for the authority he holds by God's grace in the social hierarchy, re-infusing the forest space with nobility. Second, he draws authority from the natural spaces he possesses and rules over. For a noble holding power through land and claiming social status and power, parks and chases

³⁹ Paul J. Willis relates the understanding of nature as God's handmaiden to the Renaissance concept of the "book of nature": Nature constitutes a divine text and employs all its elements in proclaiming the glory and power of God ("Tongues in Trees").

⁴⁰ Such sentiments were also used to sing the glory of God's anointed monarchs, including Elizabeth I, who often characterized herself as God's handmaiden. For example, an unnamed man delivered this speech to Elizabeth I at Kenilworth Castle during her 1575 progress:

O Queene without compare, you must not think it strange,
That here, amid this wildernese, your glorie so doth raunge.
The windes resound your worth, the rockes record your name;
These hills, these dales, these woods, these waves, these fields pronounce your fame.

(qtd. in McRae 273)

Nature and by extension, the Creator, praise Elizabeth, lending an otherworldly endorsement to a monarch who continued a long-standing practice of claiming and asserting divine right. At the same time, Elizabeth presented herself as God's handmaid (see Marcus, Mueller, and Rose).

demonstrated not only landownership, but dominion.⁴¹

When Theseus and Hippolyta embark on their morning hunt, they echo the sentiments of the Psalms passage and take advantage of the authority the woodland lends them. Scene 1 of Act 4 is their only woodland scene and the only scene, outside the first and last of the play (both in Athens) in which Theseus appears. After summoning the forester and the hounds, he and his betrothed compare hunting experiences and use language similar to that characterizing the “book of nature” concept. Theseus proposes they release the hounds and, from the mountain top, “mark the musical confusion / Of hounds and echo in conjunction” (4.1.110-111). His reference to the “music” of animals prompts Hippolyta to reminisce:

I was with Hercules and Cadmus once
 When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear
 With hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear
 Such gallant chiding; for besides the groves,
 The skies, the fountains, every region near
 Seemed all one mutual cry. I never heard
 So musical a discord, such sweet thunder. (4.1.112-18)

She interprets the discordant sounds of nature as music, directed by the activity of the hunt.

Apparently a creation of Shakespeare’s, this mythical story combines elements

⁴¹ Others recognized the social claims implied by such spaces. Chases and parks, especially conspicuous because of their pales and large herds of deer, “became a symbol of lordly privilege which invited assault” throughout medieval and early modern times by rioters who destroyed pales, drained ponds, and slaughtered deer (Dyer 24).

that lend credence to the authority of the duke and presumptive duchess: classical heroes, a wood, hunting, and the language of the book of nature. Although Hippolyta may mean simply to describe the aural effect of the hounds' voices echoing and compounding, her description implies the groves, sky, and fountains added their voices to the excitement of the event, the "gallant chiding" of the dogs against the cornered bear. Capped with the benevolent puissance of "sweet thunder," nature's praise for the baying of the bear extends itself to praise of those who preside over the hounds and the hunt itself—both in the wood of Crete and in the immediate context of the hunt in the wood near Athens. Theseus and Hippolyta enact authority in the wood beyond merely summoning the forester; they command a hunt that they believe demonstrates human ascendancy over nature, and they believe their command can bring nature itself to praise their power.⁴²

One of Theseus's commands, to fetch the forester, precipitates his and Hippolyta's discussion of the music of the hunt. Even in the wood, Theseus's demeanor is as authoritative as it is in Athens and his words as equally imperative:

Go, one of you, find out the forester,
 For now our observation is perform'd
 And since we have the vaward of this day,
 My love shall hear the music of my hounds.
 Uncouple in the western valley, let them go.
 Dispatch, I say, and find the forester. (4.1.103-08)

He speaks of the forest as he speaks of legal judgments and military campaigns, and to

⁴² In *Titus Andronicus*, Titus similarly connects the baying of the hounds to regal authority (2.2.4-6), and Tamora connects it to music (2.3.27-29).

him, it is a space not unlike Athens: he commands and is obeyed by subordinates, be they brides, citizens, servants, or dogs. The duke's end-stopped lines, many beginning with a trochaic imperative, communicate assurance and finality, and his summons also serves as a reminder of the historical background of the aristocratic chase. Although he never actually appears, Theseus's forester is a subordinate representative of the duke's authority in his palace wood. Officers such as foresters marked the space as restricted and exclusive, and they had responsibility over both beasts and men. Foresters patrolled woodland, enforced restrictions on common rights and privileges, monitored the health of the herd, and maintained the hounds. More than just a groundskeeper, a forester represented the forest and its lord. This forest is, in Theseus's mind, an extension of his palace and his domain. The identities of the lord and the forester in this wood are debatable, however, and Theseus's metaphor of the vanguard, suggesting an armed invasion on his part, ironically hints at what he does not realize: This palace wood is someone else's kingdom.

For there's more than one forester and more than one lord in this wood. Jan Kott points out that Shakespeare "confuses the frame of the plot" when he alludes to past liaisons between the royal fairy couple and the duke and duchess-to-be of Athens (308). Also, the common practice of doubling parts—which would almost certainly have been necessary for a theater company to perform the 22 parts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Kott 308-09)—create an atmosphere of confusion and a heightened sense of surveillance. At any one moment, the wood is implicitly watched over by either Theseus or Oberon, and while the doubling of parts and the confused frame may closely associate the two characters, the forest clearly demarcates them. In the palace wood, they function

differently. For example, while Theseus indicates that his perfunctory observation of May Day rites is complete (4.1.104), Oberon has watched and resolved the lovers' mismatch in the wood, furthering the aims of marriage and fecundity of those rites. The duke exercises ceremonial authority, while Oberon wields effective power. Oberon's role in transforming the palace chase into a dark and wild *selva oscura* and his easy control over Theseus's subjects reveal that the real command operating there is not the duke's, but that of Oberon the forester-king.

Before Theseus calls for his forester, King Oberon characterizes himself as "like a forester" in correcting Puck's characterization of fairies as "damned spirits":

But we are spirits of another sort.
 I with the Morning's love have oft made sport,
 And like a forester, the groves may tread
 Even till the eastern gate, all fiery red,
 Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
 Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.
 But notwithstanding, haste, make no delay;
 We may effect this business yet ere day. (3.2.388-95)

He quickly moves from the plural to the singular first-person pronoun, and he describes his special nature in terms of a love affair with a personified Morn, a freedom of movement characterized by the enjambed line ending with "tread," and *effective* power in the final couplet. Although Theseus's forester likely has personal freedom of movement in the wood to discharge his duties, forest administration is an endeavor of control: of limiting access, patrolling borders, and punishing people. Oberon the forester shows

control too, administering orders to Puck with the confidence of Theseus, but he boasts results the duke lacks. He *can* effect his will, combining in “business” the senses of consequential activity reminiscent of Athens *and* the now-obsolete sense of mischievous “busyness” that together characterize his power. He thinks of the wood in terms of a joyous permissiveness licensed by nature and predicated on power: he transcends temporal and spatial limits as he crosses the boundaries of night and day and wanders the wood at will. The assertive trochaic lines in this passage (that beginning with “I” and those describing the alchemic power of day to turn green to gold) link Oberon with the omnipotent power of nature. In fact, Oberon’s regal title suggest his own transcendence of societal definitions: he is “the King” (2.1.18), “king of shadows” (3.2.347), and finally “Fairy King” (4.1.93).

As amorous playmate with the morn and full participant in Nature’s processes, Oberon characterizes himself as “like a forester,” suggesting a legitimacy that comes from his relationship with the wood and a power, which he can, like a king, wield to effect business. Unlike foresters who are mere “forest dwellers” (as Rosalind refers to Orlando and Jaques calls the hunting lords in *As You Like It*⁴³), Oberon is a forester of authority. The business he refers to is a project of human social arrangements originating in Athens and playing out in his forest, and the repercussions of those arrangements will ostensibly extend into Athens and the future through the promise of “the issue” of the noble bridal beds that Oberon himself says “Ever shall be fortunate” (5.1.406). Oberon’s jurisdiction over human behavior and social structures suggests that his “invasion” of Theseus’s palace at the end of the play is less an invasion than an excursion similar to

⁴³ Respectively, *As You Like It* 3.2.297 and 4.2.6.

Theseus's periodic hunting invasions of the wood. While Theseus is Duke of Athens and believes himself lord of the palace wood, Oberon is truly king of the world.⁴⁴

Oberon holds an effective sway over the palace wood as opposed to the legal agency Theseus claims. In Young's words, Theseus is the fairy king's "unconscious subject," unaware of his existence and thrall to his powers (*Something of Great Constancy* 91), and Shakespeare emphasizes Theseus's ironic subjugation. While Hippolyta, having heard the lovers' stories of their night in the wood, senses a meaning or cause behind their adventures, Theseus dismissively and smugly denies any possibility of supernatural forces, instead crediting the lovers' account to the delusional madness suffered by lovers (himself excepted), madmen, and poets (5.1.2-22). That his forest is wild and that his resolution is the work of a superior power do not occur to Theseus, making him one of the jokes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁴⁵

By contrast, Oberon operates knowingly in a space whose wildness is both a product of his working and an inherent challenge to Theseus's position. He is the lord and maker of a special blend of wildness that encompasses nature's dangers and the ills of human society. Puck tells a fairy of Titania's that Oberon "would have the child / Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild" (2.1.24-25). The language of romance invokes danger and supernatural mystery, and the woods, even those owned or managed, always

⁴⁴ Leggatt similarly sees disappearing boundaries and distinctions: "Where the fairies are, there the wood is also. And so at the end when the fairies enter, the palace dissolves into the wood, bedchambers and all; it has been transported, or (like Bottom) translated" (197).

⁴⁵ A relevant authority in addition to Oberon is the queen herself, whose purview extends to the theaters. If Oberon's "imperial vot'ress" (2.1.163) alludes to Elizabeth I, the story implicates her in his power: Cupid's missed shot leaves the maiden queen chaste and infuses the love-in-idleness with the magic power Oberon employs.

retain a degree of wildness.⁴⁶ Dangers abound, human, natural, and supernatural. Spirits, mischievous pucks, half-man-half-asses, predators, and exotic beasts overrun the wood. Oberon mentions the lions, bulls, wolves, bears (2.1.180-81), lynxes, cats, leopards, and boars (2.2.30-31) with which the enchanted Titania could fall in love; Titania's fairies ward off snakes, hedgehogs, newts, and lizards (2.2.9-11). The danger of rape, capture, and death at the hands of violent men or beasts accompanies a night in the woods. Lustful man lurks, as when Demetrius insinuates that the forest is a place where a maid like Helena might be raped (2.1.214-19). All of these bugaboos inhabit the wood and fall under Oberon the forester-king's control, not that of Theseus or his forest servants.

Theseus has limited control over the natural wildness of his palace wood and no authority over the fairy kingdom he doesn't know exists. The fairies are not just elements of wildness, but instigators of it—their influence, and specifically Oberon's, encompasses the wild wood and the greater well-being of the duke's dominion. Puck blends natural and supernatural wildness into a perversion of order when he gives Bottom an ass's head, and he holds the ability to avert or preside over the violent deaths of Demetrius and Lysander, choosing to prevent their fight by an equally frightening and ominous masquerade of beasts and natural phenomena (3.1.108-111). When the feuding Oberon and Titania “meet in grove, or green” (2.1.28), their fairy followers take cover as the resulting brawl wreaks havoc on humanity. Referring to floods, fogs, and crop failure, Titania claims that “this same progeny of evils comes / From our debate, from our

⁴⁶ Thomas calls the image of a “dense, uncultivated wood” the epitome of an Elizabethan understanding of “wilderness,” adding that a mid-seventeenth century poetical dictionary lists as adjectives for the word *forest* “dreadful,” “gloomy,” “wild,” “desert,” “uncouth,” “melancholy,” “unpeopled,” and “beast-haunted” (194).

dissension; / We are their parents and original” (2.1.115-17). Although her words suggest that she and Oberon cause natural disasters, the royal couple does not operate above the realm of Nature. The weather reacts to their feud. Oberon especially is concomitant with nature, cognizant of it, capable of employing its secrets, and part and parcel of a greater force which Theseus obliquely acknowledges in his observance of May Day but does not credit with authority beyond his own. His power is societal. As natural authorities, the royal fairies boast expansive power of mortal consequence: sexual violence, murder, and supernatural disturbances that, grown out of hand, threaten human livelihood and relationships and that lie completely outside individuals’ control, including the duke’s. The fairy king’s and queen’s powers extends beyond the forest, encompassing Theseus’s duchy and beyond.

The human characters, and the play’s audiences, are certainly aware of confusion, error, and fear in the wood. For the four lovers, the wood becomes a trap from which they must be rescued, and for the six players, it is a terrifying world of metamorphosis. For both groups, it is the *selva oscura*. Even the play-within-a-play “Pyramus and Thisbe” bodes ill with its depiction of beasts, fatal mistakes, suicide, and bloody bushes in a forest setting. The palace wood is anything but civilized and liberating. Such an undermining of noble authority has intensified import in a palace wood, a setting which blends wilderness and nature with power and rule. Early modern audiences knew the dangers of their forests—outlaws, riots, and legal punishments—and would not have viewed them (except in the rare event that they *were* outlaws) as liberating.⁴⁷ The identification of the wood in

⁴⁷ See David Bevington’s discussion of the ominous nature of the fairies and the nighttime forest. In complicating Kott’s dark psychological reading of the forest, Jeanne Addison Roberts writes, “Kott is right to emphasize the presence of the ominous, but wrong to insist that either Shakespeare or his audience

A Midsummer Night's Dream with early modern chases brings with it resonances of landownership, ancient tradition, common rights, privilege, and the tension implicit in such political and socioeconomic issues. And eventually, when the comfort of restoration comes, it occurs under the gaze of the duke but at the orchestration of greater forces.

Theseus's obliviousness to the forces at work in his kingdom—forces that can grant his subjects' wishes, cross his decrees, and threaten agricultural and economic survival—suggests a critical ineptitude in noble leadership. The sense of the forest as a wild and secretive place of disorder collides with the cultural context of the highly controlled, "refined" noble chases of Tudor and Stuart England, all the while challenging the land-based authority of the nobility within the play and without. The presumed authority held by the duke in his palace wood is deeply undercut by the depictions of an oblivious Theseus and a powerful Forester-King—a depiction revealing criticism of noble pretensions and locating authentic power in a figure identified both with royalty and with the land itself.

Shakespeare's ambivalent portrayal of Theseus, and the discussion of the legally granted rights of ownership and possession at the play's beginning, invoke the associations his audiences would have had with the topic of woodland access and the resentment they may have felt about elite entitlements. Interpretations of Theseus as a tyrant and his oblivious inability to understand the forces at work in his wood question the aristocracy's dominance over forests.⁴⁸ In the first scene of the play, Theseus instructs

would have responded to the evils as subconscious or instinctive or the setting itself as liberating" (110). Edward Berry's work on English hunting asserts that Shakespeare was keenly aware of the social and political reverberations of hunting (214).

⁴⁸ See, for example, D'Orsay W. Pearson's article, "'Unkinde' Theseus: A Study in Renaissance Mythography." Pearson argues that Theseus's classical reputation as an unfaithful lover and unnatural

Hermia, “You are but as a form in wax, / By him imprinted, and within his power / To leave the figure or disfigure it” (1.1.49-51). Theseus refers to her father Egeus, although Theseus himself claims all authority in Athens to imprint, figure, or disfigure his subjects and his spaces. The duke takes great pains to infuse his realm with his authority, which makes the undercutting of his decrees all the more biting. Oberon is the only one who has creation, including coupling and procreation, “within his power.” For despite the duke’s self-presentation as an authoritative ruler whose command over nature and society infuses the wood with noble authority, the very nature of the forest as a place of continual conflict and the greater forces within it suggest that the nobility’s exclusive claims to natural space are both unviable and unkind, in both the early sense of “unnatural” and the modern sense of “unjust.”

“Men of great worth resorted to this forest”: *As You Like It and the Forest as Judge*

The forest and duke of *As You Like It* (1599) come into theatrical existence simultaneously:

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 is the envious court? (2.1.1-4)

These words at once identify the character as the exiled duke, locate the scene as a forest escape, and associate the two as one: on the stage, the actor’s words bring into existence “this life” of Duke Senior, “gentle lord of the forest” (Leech 108), and “these woods” at

father was as equally resonant, if not more, to Renaissance audiences as was his embodiment of reason and heroic prowess.

the same moment.⁴⁹ The speech also defines the duke's relationship to his surroundings, where he contemplates a space tinged with the association of spiritual sojourn and seclusion. His manner is markedly introspective. He lacks the civic and martial context given to Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, speaks not to servants but to "co-mates and brothers," issues no commands but asks questions, and rejects the pomp Theseus promotes. He has not been shown at court to contrast and separate him from the space of the forest; rather, he is introduced as part of the forest itself, an inhabitant, rather than a landowner on a pleasant daytrip or armed campaign. Most importantly, his words show from the outset a need to make sense of the forest, to sermonize on its meaning to his existence as an *exiled* duke, and they acknowledge authority in it, not in himself. His humble mindset is markedly different from the nonsense approach taken by Theseus, who sees no reason to justify his experience in a palace wood he believes he dominates.

In addition to ducal differences between these two plays, the forest differs from Theseus's (or Oberon's) palace wood as well. It is the forest of Arden. It alludes to historical forests in France and England, and, in the case of the latter, to a forest of particular pride and significance in the heartland of England. It is also ownerless, contrasted throughout the play to privately held land bought, sold, and controlled. The differences involve questions of landownership in a historical context of changing economic systems, legal authority, and the relationship of the forest as a symbolic space to those who can compound the authority it represents and would use that authority. In a play that is so "still at the center," Arden itself is a powerful force more than a place, and

⁴⁹ A. Stuart Daley differentiates between woodland scenes and "pasture" scenes in *As You Like It* and identifies Rosalind with the latter, her father with the former ("Where are the Woods" 180).

people must reckon with it. Many characters strive to survive within the forest, Duke Senior engages it for an understanding of his exile, and Duke Ferdinand eventually submits to its judgment.

Commentators frequently refer to Arden in *As You Like It* as simultaneously “real” and imaginary. Certainly it is representational, and not, with its olive trees and lioness, an accurate description of an English (or French) forest. It represents a space of pastoral fantasy and satire. Yet critics are fond at pointing out its “real” aspects in the sense of *realistic*, depicting as it does the “churlish chiding of the winter’s wind” (2.1.7) and the threat of starvation. Michael Hennessy uses these details to argue that “Arden is indeed a real place” (147).⁵⁰ Yet for him and other critics, this realism is intratextual; whether located in the harshness of nature or the harshness of a corrupt court, the play’s realism does not extend beyond its pages or offstage. Albert R. Cirillo typifies the traditional view in his argument that “By making the Forest of Arden a temporary retreat from the world of the Machiavellian court, Shakespeare suggests the ideal which should be the foundation of the real [...] the world of the possible which should inform the actual” (19). Yet Arden was and is indeed a real place (remnants of which are extant), and examining how the actual informs the imaginary can provide insights into the play’s imagined “possibilities for a new way of being-together-in-the-world” (Bristol 281).⁵¹

Shakespeare’s setting, characters, and plot in *As You Like It* stem from his source, Thomas Lodge’s 1590 *Rosalynde: Or, Euphues’ Golden Legacy*, in which the Ardennes

⁵⁰ Willis agrees that forests are “actual environments” and “places” in Shakespeare’s comedies, as opposed to mere settings or backdrops to action (“Now Am I in Arden” 48).

⁵¹ Bristol’s focus is on urban theater’s replacement of “ancestral technologies of shame and intimidation,” such as skimmingtons (281), that established social relationships with “a new kind of social interaction based on disengagement, social distance, and the acknowledgement of difference” (304).

forest of France shelters the usurped King Gerismond (Senior), Rosalynde, Celia, Rosader (Orlando), and Adam from the fury of the usurper Torismond (Ferdinand) and Rosader's greedy brother Saladyne (Oliver).⁵² In addition to changing some character names and demoting the kings to dukes, Shakespeare creates a forest of English character.⁵³ Swapan Chakravorty insists, "There was no preexistent forest for Shakespeare to 'convert' to Arcadia or to anything else: one must interpret the representation in order to constitute a plausible object of the playwright's imitation" (157). The interpretative gap is real, but so is a plausible preexistent inspiration: a standing English forest. Although Shakespeare half-heartedly maintains the premise of a French setting, as when Oliver calls his brother a "fellow of France" (1.1.142-43), the more immediate reference for him and his audiences is the forest of Arden in the playwright's native Warwickshire.⁵⁴

Arden was a name resounding in import. Barton reports that antiquarian John Leland observed during Henry VIII's reign (and William Camden echoed in 1586) that Warwickshire was divided into the forest of Arden north of the Avon, known simply as "Arden," and the agricultural district south of the river, or the "Feldon." Schoenbaum

⁵² Daley concludes in "Observation on the Natural Settings..." that the only element the forests (in Shakespeare or Lodge) share with each other or the historical Ardennes is the name.

⁵³ The only king in *As You Like It* is subjunctive. Orlando assures Ganymede he will marry Rosalind: "That would I, were I of all kingdoms king" (5.4.10). John Michael Archer, among other commentators, also notes the particular Englishness of the play's country scenes (60).

⁵⁴ A more personal connection for Shakespeare would have been his mother's maiden name of Arden. In fact, personal connections abound. Maurice Hunt envisions a Shakespeare so influenced by a looming Arden and nostalgic boyhood memories of Elizabeth I's 1575 progress through Warwickshire that the characters of William in *As You Like It* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* represent playful autobiographical sketches. Schoenbaum reports that in the late sixteenth century Anne Hathaway's cottage likely stood near the edge of the forest of Arden (79-80). He also describes the cachet of the Arden family name, "one of the most venerable names in Warwickshire" and connected to "lords of Warwick" since before the Norman invasion (19). Although the branch of Arden from which Shakespeare descended was less illustrious, "affluent yeomen shading into minor gentry" (19), the Clarenceux King-of-Arms noted as part of Shakespeare's plea for a coat of arms that John Shakespeare had "married a daughter and heir of Arden" (Schoenbaum 38-39).

describes the region around Stratford-Upon-Avon during Shakespeare's time: "To the north the Forest of Arden, thick with undergrowth, sheltered abundant deer and other small game. The river, dividing champaign from woodland, supplied fresh water and a means of communication" (4). Camden perpetuated the myth that the word *Arden* meant "woods" to the ancient Britons and portrayed Arden as England's greatest forest ("Parks and Ardens" 354). It certainly was a forest of considerable size and long history (Rogers 285). From the middle ages, Arden was a "distinctive landscape" of villages, isolated farms, and enclosed fields and woodland, and its farmers and inhabitants were poor, despite the forest's increasingly exploited resources (B. K. Roberts 101). Historically, Warwickshire underwent a drastic population increase, an influx of unlanded workers and craftsmen, and food shortages in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Skipp). That Arden lacked the "protection" of royal forest status was its downfall, leading to slow and steady parceling out, aggristment (grazing livestock in the forest), and industry (Barton, "Parks and Ardens" 354) that would bring fellow Warwickshire man Michael Drayton to lament in *Poly-Olbion* (1612-22) its fallen fortunes as England's representative forest.⁵⁵ Yet its cultural importance persisted. Its status might be earliest recorded by the Gough map (MS Gough Gen. Top. 16 Bodleian), dated between 1325 and 1360. It includes the label "Arderne" in what would be Warwickshire, denoting either a forest or a district (Parsons) in the prestigious company of such ancient forests as New Forest, Dean, and Sherwood.

Arden was deeply associated with Englishness. In the thirteenth song of *Poly-Olbion*, Drayton and his scholarly annotator John Selden describe Warwickshire as "the

⁵⁵ Della Hooke believes that Arden may have been a royal forest at one time ("The Warwickshire Arden.")

heart of *England*' and rely on its links to the fables and romance of Arden. Drayton depicts it as one of England's defining regions; Selden writes, "By reason of this her greatnes joy'nd with Antiquity, Hee also made choise of this place for description of the Chase, the England simples, and Hermit" (qtd. in Rogers 285). Similar elements of the hunt, pastoral rustics, and the hermit all appear more prominently in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* than in *Rosalynde*, suggesting a closer link between the play and his homeland than with its literary source.

Consequently, when Rosalind performs her "performative gesture [of...] *fiat sylvius*" (Bristol 279) in her declaration, "Well, this is the forest of Arden" (2.4.15), she raises on the stage a specific forest of significant cultural status. Touchstone's wry lament, "Ay, now am I in Arden, the more fool I" (16) reinforces its weighty reputation. Their weary contemplation of exile is cut short by the entrance of Corin and Sylvius, and by the end of the scene, Celia and Rosalind become landowners in the purlieus (disafforested lands at the edge of a forest).⁵⁶ Their initial reaction to the forest dissolves in Celia's final comment, "I like this place, / And willingly could waste my time in it" (94-95). Her pun on "waste" invokes the dangerous wooded expanses of romance (such as Spenser's Wood of Errour), yet at the same time, her actions introduce into this waste a gentle domesticity. Celia trusts and accepts the forest's shelter. Arden transforms from a glum location of forced flight to that of a home where noblewomen play at shepherd and shepherdess. This short scene also encapsulates qualities associated with the Arden of Warwickshire: a forest home with an ancient aura of noble authority and English pride. As a geographical and cultural space of ancient origin, it represents a noble England and

⁵⁶ Heather Dubrow discusses the significance of Rosalind's home in the purlieus, "troping as they do many aspects of her situation" as marginalized and liminal (68).

yet a commons stronghold, infused with a mystical aura of authority. As a space of possibility, this forest of Arden founds its possibilities on a land-based authority lent to noble rulers and accessible to others.

The social geography of the play, populated as it is by the lowly and the highborn, is closely tied to its forest locale, and it is a space not of idealized aristocratic pastoral or of egalitarian utopian fantasy, but what might best be described as commonality. All inhabitants of Arden strive for survival by hunting or raising livestock. The forest has an aura of commonality not unlike the agrarian systems and village organization that encouraged tenants, laborers, and local gentry to disavow proprietary claims to the commons, to land used by all. Unlike many major forests, Arden never held the status of royal forest (B. K. Roberts 101), which would have reserved most rights for the monarch and severely curtailed all others' activities in the wood. Here, in a forest Shakespeare explicitly distinguishes from privately owned land (even more so than he distinguishes it from the court), a legitimate duke converses with his subjects, contemplates the land, and is eventually restored to the throne, sans any agency of his own. The communal will as embodied in the forest restores him. As Jeanne Addison Roberts argues, the "romantic fallacy that there is a redemptive power in the very presence of a benign green world" elides human agency in nature (115).⁵⁷ She sees Shakespeare's forests as all "wild forests" that allow characters to resolve problems they have with other people. Yet Arden harbors redemptive power, and its source is social rather than natural or supernatural. Viewed in this light, Duke Senior's restoration is not the blessing of a Dame Nature but the reinstatement of legitimate authority by a common will whose interests and identity

⁵⁷ Roberts refers to Northrup Frye's formulations of the green world.

are embodied in the Forest of Arden.

Arden is a no-man's land, in the sense not of population, but of possession. More defining than its olive trees and lioness is its clear opposition to land under individual legal ownership. We are not given to understand that any one person owns it or controls it, and it is consistently contrasted to land that is owned. The contrast begins before Arden is introduced. The play opens with Orlando's anger brimming over at his treatment by his brother Oliver. Orlando's vulnerability as a second son is directly tied to his position as landless. Shakespeare applies the tension of fraternity, authority, and land not only to Orlando and Oliver, but to Duke Senior and his brother Frederick as well. Even Rosalind's lament about her sad "estate" (1.2.15) captures a sense not only of condition, but of land; in her father's usurpation, she has lost her status, position as heir, and the dukedom—literally the land.⁵⁸

The topic of legal and economic control of land occupies many characters in *As You Like It* and continues to set Arden off as communal land opposed to individually owned land or royal demesne. Charles explains that the lands of Duke Senior's loyal followers now enrich Frederick (1.1.102-103). Orlando berates the new economy in his praise of Adam, a man of "the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not meed!" (2.3.57-58). Soon after, Rosalind and Celia produce the gold needed to buy Corin's master's cottage and lands, promising to keep him on as a laborer. Frederick seizes the de

⁵⁸ Hennessy notes that in *As You Like It*, "The court's tyranny [...] is at least partially described in terms of its power to control land" (144), and Richard Wilson sees Orlando's situation as indicative of the social and economic crisis created by a system of primogeniture that left its losing sons landless. Shakespeare's source sketches the implications of landownership more starkly than do Orlando's complaints about education and servitude. For example, Rosader responds to a demeaning order from his brother: "I am thine equal by nature though not by birth, [...] Let me question with thee why thou hast felled my woods, spoiled my manor houses, and made havoc of such utensils as my father bequeathed unto me? I tell thee, Saladyne, either answer me as a brother or I will trouble thee as an enemy" (Lodge 105). In that story, we witness Orlando's (Rosader's) disenfranchisement and glimpse its dangerous social consequences.

Boys estates (3.1.8-10). Rosalind advises Phoebe to “sell when you can, you are not for all markets” (3.5.60), mocks Jaques for having “sold your own lands to see other men’s” (4.1.22-23), and reminds Orlando that he does not have a house to offer a potential wife (4.1.56). At play’s end, Oliver promises to “estate upon” Orlando the de Boys lands and rents (5.2.11-12), a plan which happily succeeds when Frederick abdicates for a monastic life and restores the exiles’ lands (5.4.160-65). Finally, Orlando surpasses even this family legacy and gains the dukedom itself as Duke Senior’s heir. All of this highlights by contrast a forest having no proprietary source nor even a possessive pronoun. And although Duke Senior’s first speech sets up the court as the antithesis of “these woods,” it is primarily Touchstone—notably Frederick’s fool and unacquainted with Duke Senior—who insists upon a comparison of court and country in his debate with Corin and his performance of the seven degrees of the lie. The court versus country dichotomy serves as a larger framework to the play’s specific contrast between private land and the forest.

Surrounded by privately owned land such as Rosalind and Celia’s purlieu farm and infused with talk about landownership, Arden is also not coincidentally fringed by social tension and the risks of riot and disorder. Richard Wilson cites economic pressures as inspiring unrest in the historical Arden as coal and timber resources led to enclosure of forest lands. For him, “Shakespeare’s drama of feuding dukes predicts that the struggle between the regulated and market economies will be decided ““in the skirts of the forest,”” while the “actual Forest of Arden was a hotbed of sedition” (72). By contrast, Shakespeare’s fictional Arden is a space of courtesy (akin to the courtesy Calidore represents in the forests of Book VI in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*) where disorder lurks on the borders, yet is not allowed entry. The stillness at the center of Arden could of

course be derived from a number of sources—its lack of civilization and its desolation as a waste, perhaps, or an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo. Yet Shakespeare's forest is a busy social scene of lively conversations, bantering between shepherds and dukes, and impassioned wooing. And it remains peaceful, refusing to admit dangerous disorder, such as Frederick's force. Shakespeare's Arden has a power and authority of its own, that, in light of its opposition to private land and its historical prestige as representatively English, suggest an infusion of communal will and good will.

The primary dilemma presented in *As You Like It* is sociopolitical: true authority as dictated by political theory, ancient tradition, and the play's own moral ethos is relegated to the forest and exiled from court. Duke Senior's usurpation is the greatest example of disorder, and it forms the opposite scenario to most forest riots: instead of outlaws resisting noble authority, authority is driven to outlawry within the forest to avoid the riotous wrath of the rebellious. Orlando merely contemplates thievery as a means for survival (2.2.31-32); Duke Senior becomes the outlaw of medieval romance, Robin Hood. The wrestler Charles tells Oliver, "They say he is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world" (1.1.114-19). These men, former lords, are now forest dwellers, "foresters" of a liberal greenwood. Robin Hood's presence, in the figure of Duke Senior, is part of the iconography of the greenwood and central to an inversion of power that locates authority in the forest itself.

Robin Hood legends held a deep sociopolitical as well as literary resonance familiar to early modern English people. Robert Leach writes of Robin Hoods, dressed in

green during May festivals: “They represented, in at best a half-articulated way, the ‘noble outlaw’, some kind of ‘natural’ order as opposed perhaps to manmade legalities and structures which permitted, for instance, the gradual encroachment of enclosure upon common land” (393).⁵⁹ Richard Wilson echoes that “In the age of enclosure the outlaw legend became the semantic field where the liberties of the forest were symbolically fought out between gamekeeper and poachers,” adding that Tudor authorities viewed Robin Hood games and plays with suspicion. For them, the label “Robin Hood” became shorthand for a rebel (74); for many English people, it denoted a hero of the commons.

That Duke Senior becomes the outlaw Robin Hood, then, combines the legitimacy of inherited noble authority with the legendary popular hero, and this outlaw story takes its narrative tack from a celebratory view rather than the defensive view taken by the Crown. Duke Senior is not just Robin Hood, but “the old Robin Hood of England” (1.1.116). The specificity of place may once again be Shakespeare’s faint reminder that the play takes place in France, suggesting that Charles must place the figure of Robin Hood for Oliver. The question of nation arises in conversation at particular moments of valuation and judgment. Oliver calls Orlando “the stubbornest young fellow of France” (1.1.142-143) during an attempt to defame him and avert culpability for murder; Duke Senior is figured as a Robin Hood but ameliorated as a man whose goodness is proven by the many gentlemen who choose to abandon the court and their estates to live with him in Arden. The “old Robin Hood” taps nostalgia for the golden world, of course, but links

⁵⁹ Leach sees in *As You Like It* an expanded dramatic enactment of the Robin Hood May games widely practiced between 1400 and 1600. He also sees a “timelessness” in Robin Hood storylines involving Robin’s humiliating of day laborers and tradesmen (399)—a nostalgia akin to Orlando’s for the golden world and a rejection of an evolving market economy. Jay Halio writes of *As You Like It* that “timelessness in Arden (on the whole) contrasts favorably to the time-consciousness of court and city life” (197). Forests, which many believed had stood in England since time immemorial, were implicated in such timelessness.

him to the immemorial nature of the forest refuge. Robin Hood—the noble and gentle version celebrated by the masses—is of old England, claimed by the English. The referent, Duke Senior, is by association then “of England” too—of its loyal people, and its land.

That Duke Senior is “of Arden” becomes clear as he is internalized in it and internalizes its authority. No human authority rules with force or agency in the forest of Arden, although the duke’s authority as a nobleman of the highest rank—in the eyes of his merry men, the newly arrived refugees, the forest locals, and the play’s audience—remains intact despite his political impotence. Legitimate authority in *As You Like It* is closely connected to the forest itself, rather than the economic or social trappings of power—or even his ducal lands, the basis for his status—which momentarily lie outside the duke’s grasp. Instead, he is subject and pupil to a forest space that holds the authority of ancient England and Robin Hood, popular national hero.

His physical presence there reaffirms his position of authority and power, reauthorizing his return to court at the abrupt end of his brother’s reign. Frederick, the corrupt duke, remains outside the forest space. Swerving from Lodge’s plotline, in which the usurping duke is killed in battle by the legitimate one, Shakespeare uses the forest to solve the problem of rightful rule. Frederick, having heard that “men of great worth resorted to this forest” (5.4.155), arrives armed with the intent of killing his brother. He is instead miraculously converted at the forest’s borders to a monastic life and gives up the dukedom. The illegitimate duke cannot even enter Arden, the heart of England, and the forest becomes the authority about which Touchstone quips to Rosalind: “Let the forest judge” (3.2.122). The forest sustains and reauthorizes legitimate rule, eventually

returning the duke to his status in society.

It does this partly through the commonality fostered by Arden, a communal authority evident in the forest's social harmony and further heightened by Frederick's (and Jaques's) withdrawal from public life. When informed of his brother's conversion, Duke Senior is eager enough to return to court where his followers will also "share the good of our returned fortune, / According to the measure of their states" (5.4.174-175). Arden's particular power to reinstate Duke Senior to his state and estates, and his gentlemen followers to theirs, stems from Arden's status as common land (as opposed to royal forest or private chase) and the community of "citizens" that inhabit it, to borrow Jaques's word. His socially charged term for the deer of the wood carries many valences, including the sense of a city or town dweller (*OED* 1a) as opposed to rural countrymen (*OED* 1c) and commoners as opposed to gentlemen (*OED* 1d).⁶⁰ Shakespeare's Arden is certainly not the forest desert or wasteland of medieval romance, uncivilized and unpopulated, but a community of people of every social status whose interactions negotiate a social arrangement that reaffirms the duke's place and enables him to return to it. It is, while not a town or village, a bustling locus for a social experiment that removes the trappings of social status yet reinstates the duke to the status he held before the play began.

Arden does not erase class distinctions but reinforces a nostalgic and mutual "courtesy" between them.⁶¹ Barton's introduction claims about *As You Like It*, "Worldly

⁶⁰ In his study of the early modern language of "citizenship" (an urban counterpart perhaps to my idea of communality in the forest), Archer explores use of the term *citizen* and ideas of citizenship to reformulate a conception of "the middling sort" and propose a more complex, dynamic spectrum of social class (12-15).

⁶¹ Gabriel Egan's ecocritical reading of the play suggests a larger concept of courtesy across creation. He posits that "an essential equality of animals and humans is reasserted" in the forest (99). He notes that Duke

assets and success cease to matter. In the forest, judgments are made only in terms of what people are” (400). But what people are—noble or rustic, courtly or simple—is still abundantly clear, despite individual characters’ strained circumstances or disguises. Duke Senior is privileged and his entourage treats him with due deference. Audrey is lowly. Rosalind can play both genders and both lady and shepherd, but she is always a duke’s daughter. But high and low people discuss on level ground the structure of human society. Touchstone cannot resist harassing the common forest dwellers, Corin and William, about their unsophisticated ways. Corin, for his part, holds his own with dignity. Rosalind tells Celia of conversing with her father while disguised as a shepherd: “I met the Duke yesterday, and had much question with him. He ask’d me of what parentage I was. I told him as good as he, so he laugh’d and let me go” (3.5.35-38). The joke aside, Ganymede’s assertion of inherent equality is met by good humor and respect. Although *As You Like It* doesn’t erase social status, it acknowledges distinctions while questioning their underpinnings.⁶²

Orlando discovers a functioning and peaceful community when he demands inclusion into Arden. He finds his threatening demands for food met with a kind invitation to join the group, an invitation he doesn’t expect in “this desert inaccessible” (2.7.110) where he “thought that all things had been savage here” (2.7.107). The conversation that follows, in which Orlando invokes the cultural institutions of society in a series of conditional constructions and Duke Senior echoes them in almost liturgical

Senior’s and Jaques’s misgivings about hunting have as much to do with place and the perceived inappropriateness of violence in the animals’ home as it does with the killing (100).

⁶² Juliet Dusinberre, writing of an intertextual and metafictional literary community, states, “The dramatist has conjured into his own Forest of Arden not only Queen and court, shepherd and jester, princess and milkmaid, but poets, alive and dead, who, like the banished courtiers, are carousing under the oaks. But the table at which they sit is surely a new Round Table. For there is no specially privileged voice among them, no sovereignty” (82).

fashion, reflects a life of necessary fellowship. At the duke's suggestion to Orlando that "Your gentleness shall force / More than your force move us to gentleness" (2.7.102-103), the richly parallel and anaphoric conversation moves from this pun on class to the communal rituals that unite people:

Duke S. True is it that we have seen better days,
 And have with holy bell been knoll'd to church,
 And sat at good men's feasts and wip'd our eyes
 Of drops that sacred pity hath engend'red;
 And therefore sit you down in gentleness,
 And take upon command what help we have
 That to your wanting may be minist'red. (2.7.120-26)

Duke Senior answers the uncertainty of Orlando's hopeful "ifs" with a confirmation of community and plural pronouns markedly denoting common experience, not the royal plural. The unity of their characters is created in a language that uses repetition and echoing to align their speech as well as their social status, which will be fully reconciled at the play's conclusion when Orlando becomes the duke's heir. Their talk of church bells, feasts, sacred pity, and ministrations come as a climax to spiritual themes of repentance, conversion, and the need to be fed. Community takes precedence over the individual. Yet the play at large suggests a Protestant subjectivity: authority becomes available to individuals rather than the representative head alone. Authority dwells not in Duke Senior, but in the individuals who form the Arden community and in the forest itself. Reverence and fellowship tint the forest, creating an aura of dignity available to all its inhabitants. The details of a cave-dwelling Duke Senior (harkening to the wise Hermit

of Drayton's Arden) and the conversions of Oliver and Frederick further imbue the forest with a spiritual authority. When he returns to court, the duke's return is enabled and blessed by a communal Arden.⁶³

Contributing to the fellowship of the forest is the way Arden's authority—spiritual, social, and political—is markedly diffuse, manifest in various mysterious men of the wood. Duke Senior's identification with the “old Robin Hood of England” in the first scene of the play is invoked again when old men who also never appear in the play figure prominently in its resolution. Rosalind, still disguised as Ganymede, assures Orlando that she can produce his beloved through powers she learned from “a magician, most profound in his art, and yet not damnable” (5.2.60-61). She had previously explained her refined speech to Orlando by way of “an old religious uncle” who drew on his inland youth to teach her to speak (3.2.344). Finally, Jaques de Boys explains that Duke Frederick has withdrawn from public life, having met at “the skirts of this wild wood” “an old religious man” who converted him to a monastic life (5.4.159-60). These old men, whether figments of Rosalind's cover or unseen characters, are apparently three different individuals, yet their common characteristics link them together. They are old, ostensibly common, and of the forest, and they have transformative power over others. Although they never emerge out of the murky woods onto the stage, their influence removes the barriers between protagonist lovers and noble brothers.

These old men presumably live what Duke Senior himself calls a life of “old

⁶³ See John W. Mahon's work on meals and spirituality in Shakespeare's plays for more on the significance of communal meals to character, plot, and genre. Dusinger believes that both Catholic and Protestant elements “coexist comfortably” in Arden (76) and that religious authority itself in the play is undermined by “two opposed cultural traditions: the radical Christian impetus behind the carnivalesque, parodic and bawdy French romance, and the high culture pagan landscape of classical pastoral” (77).

custom” (2.1.2) in “these woods” (2.1.3), and his forest trials inculcate him so he can join their ranks. The old religious uncle, the magician, the old religious man, and the elder duke, Senior, blend into a space associated with the “old Robin Hood of England” and old custom. If “the potency of place [is] enacted by a character or characters who in some way inhere in the wilderness setting” (Willis “‘Now Am I in Arden,’” 49), the forester-king Oberon is the embodiment of the forest’s force in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and these old men represent the ancient, communal authority of the forest of Arden. Imbued as they are in its authority, they bestow it upon their forest neophyte, Duke Senior, before restoring him to political power at court. The communal nature of the forest’s power is reinforced by the duke’s daughter, who painstakingly cultivates an ethic of consent in her social engineering, soliciting spoken agreement and repeated expressions of consent in the final scene of the play as she arranges three marriages.⁶⁴ Bristol writes that the play “experiments with a social world where the idea of mutual consent is really taken seriously” (303). Mutuality, consent, and commonality reside in Arden.

The peaceful conclusion of *As You Like It*, built on consent, reinforces the power of Arden. The forest as a force supplants physical force in resolving the dangerous conflicts inherent in the play. Violence lurks in its margins, but no one dies in *As You Like It* (unlike in Lodge’s romance); the final victory comes through conversion and peaceful restoration, not the usurper’s death on the battlefield, and it brings a status quo judgment made by Arden itself in harboring and restoring the rightful duke. The duke’s worth, and that of the loyal people who followed him to the wood, is compounded by the

⁶⁴ The heavy emphasis on consent helps to explain the seemingly incongruent moment in which Orlando grants his consent to his older brother Oliver’s marriage to Celia (5.2.13).

great worth of a forest representing a common and ancient English will. *As You Like It* proves to be fertile ground for experimental social negotiations of authority between the powerful and the subordinate, the land and its inhabitants. It adds the question of legitimacy to a discussion which has already examined noble impotence. Now, in presenting a duke who is not oblivious to his impotence, but illegally and politically disabled in exile, the forest becomes not a dark place of comical mockery, but of restoration. While the palace wood undermines legitimate authority, Arden reestablishes it with the implied stipulation that its own authority dictates right rule and bestows power on the deserving.

Literary forests are often associated with transformation, as in Bottom's translation to a beast in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Oliver's and Frederick's moral conversions in *As You Like It*, and "the forest, like the stage, offers little resistance to the imagination's transforming powers" (van den Berg 887). But in the latter play, the forest transforms rather marginal characters and not the characters whose moral nature (and often noble status) we have faith in and who are rewarded, not changed (e.g., Rosalind, Celia, Orlando, Duke Senior, and Corin). The status quo is reestablished at play's end, enabled by Arden, for transformation gives way to reaffirmation and endorsement of legitimate authority, a recognition of authority in the forest itself. *As You Like It* dramatizes the possibility of an authorizing power of the forest—of land itself—that supports the social hierarchy. Yet the lurking danger is that such authority may become available to those of lower status as well, be they potentially riotous rustics or women who buy land and live without masters. The potential and possibilities of "if," so prominent a word in the final scenes of *As You Like It*, remains, and the stage itself makes

the “ifs” suggested in the forest into realities, if only momentarily.

London audiences watched plays “on the boards” of open-air theaters that were themselves re-formed forests imported into the city. The structure of public theaters such as the Theater and the Globe must have required large timber trees which may have been visually prominent as part of the architectural support of a three-storied building.⁶⁵ Combined with a covered, rickety, creaking stage, the circular structure formed a space which was truly a “Wooden O.” There audiences viewing a forest comedy witness an experience that mirrors their own: “The forest, in short, is a reflection of the play as *theatrical* fiction: just as the characters withdraw from the normal world to a festive green world of disguise, imagination, and metamorphosis, so do the spectators withdraw to the playhouse, which is the actual and substantial world of disguise, imagination, and metamorphosis” (van den Berg 887). Their identification with characters could have run deep. Chris Fitter sees the hunters’ celebration of the kill (Act 4, scene 2) as tapping popular resistance to forest laws and restrictions on game sales and consumption, and he argues that the scene created a bond between early modern theater audiences and characters that “betokened merry communal defiance of officialdom” (207). Giles Allen’s complaints against the rebellious owners of the new Globe and the wildness of the theater as an endeavor linger in equally subversive if less overt ways. Although officialdom is restored in *As You Like It*, it has been tested and blessed by the greater force of common will.

Answering the question of “what happens to dukes in staged forests?” might be as

⁶⁵ Rackham comments that a medieval custom of showcasing massive timbers as part of architecture, even in private homes, lasted into the seventeenth century in the dwellings of the less privileged. By then, the trend-setting nobility and gentry had chosen to cover structural timbers (77).

simple as noting that dukes are made and unmade in the forests of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. Bristol argues that Rosalind's "*fiat sylvius*" "demonstrates the authority of theater to act in social space" and that her words and likely accompanying gestures indicating a forest space create an understanding with the audience about the play's social context (279). By the end of these plays, however, a forester-king has allowed Duke Theseus to retain his comfortable rule, and the forest of Arden has "created" Senior as a duke again, reinstating him to the lands which grant him his title and status. The plays' content and performative contexts locate ultimate authority in forester-kings, old men, actors, and the forest space where they enact their creative powers.

Both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* present forests—so deeply associated with resistance, yet at the same time lending the aura of divine and ancient authority to the ruling class—as harboring authority outside the control or grasp of their respective dukes. They also resist a symbiotic, bilateral interpretation of power exchange based on landownership and the emerging market economy: although lands may change hands as dukes rise and fall (and flee to the forest and return to court), the source of power and legitimate authority in the forest is intangible, ephemeral, and tied to conceptions of communal Englishness. That a fairy king and old Robin Hoods hold effective power further reinforces the divide represented by John Manwood and Arthur Standish between monarch and commons, leaving the aristocracy dependent on the good will of other ranks. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* unveils a façade of ducal authority in favor of a powerful being both kingly and common, and *As You Like It* restores its duke contingent on communal approval. If Willis is right that "setting moves the soul of a

forest comedy” (“Now Am I in Arden” 44), we find that the forests move people in these two comedies, establishing social order in ways that ultimately settle authority in the land and divorce noble status—directly tied to land in early modern English society—from its legitimizing source. Barbara Bono writes that for Rosalind, “the imaginative space provided by the forest can take her this far—to an imagined wedding” (205); for English audiences, the historical forest may similarly reinstate the status quo. But Shakespeare’s imaginative use of historically infused space reveals the uncertain foundation of social arrangements and suggests the momentous change that will, eventually, play out on the political stage.

Chapter Three: Squires of the Wood: The Decline of the Aristocratic Forest in

The Faerie Queene

The movement between the last two complete books of *The Faerie Queene* has traditionally been figured as a retreat from harsh history into poetic fantasy, from the problems of time to the power of poetry. Harry Berger, Jr. expresses the transition in terms of landscape: “Book VI retreats from the plains, mountains and rocky coast of Book V into the rich wood of Faerie forms and motifs” (38). Yet when Spenser’s knight of courtesy, Calidore, leaves the narrative in canto 3, critical attention to the text seems to lapse as well. The first two-thirds of the book are eclipsed by the epiphany of the Graces in canto 9 (the canto in which Calidore returns to the story) and widely ignored by critics, whose general collective judgment can be summed up in J. C. Maxwell’s indictment of the cantos as “rather dull and invertebrate” (143). The Mount Acidale episode merits examination as the apex of the book’s story and as central to questions about the poet’s metapoetic vision and self-representation. But the critical silence on the cantos that precede it leaves questions unanswered. Why does the book seem so bifurcated, divided into two very different narratives: one a digressive and episodic story of romance adventure, the other a pastoral love story centering on the hero? Why is there no dominant protagonist for much of the first part? Why does Spenser set the first eight cantos in the forest and the remaining in a pastoral community? Finally, these questions represent elements of a larger question: What is the purpose of the first two-thirds of Book 6?

I would like to explore this question by way of the principal setting of the first eight cantos, the forest, and to suggest that these cantos are important to Spenser’s views on the aristocratic dream in England. Critics who have considered Spenser’s woodland

setting generally view it as a backdrop for successive episodes of adventure that demonstrate courtesy. His woods do display the full range of literary forest topoi: danger, wandering, exile, licentiousness, madness, holy seclusion, and healing. The affinity Spenser feels with the forest landscape has struck more than one reader. Richard Schramm calls it Spenser's most beloved scenery (35), and Robert Welch's 1994 *The Kilcolman Notebook*, a novel depicting the dreams of a fictional Spenser as he drafts his opus, brings the poet to "fantasize about Irish timber pressed into the poem's pages" (Herron 122). The umbrage of the final book is a full blossoming of the poem's flirtation with the forest in all its literary significance, and all other settings "are felt as little more than breaks in the forest continuum" (Piehler).⁶⁶

But limiting the forest to the role of "stage" constricts it to the realm of the fictional and neglects the context of historical forests in early modern England.⁶⁷ The "conspicuously remote" setting of Book 6 (Stillman 302) begs historical context for a full understanding of its depiction of the role of the poet in a social landscape undergoing the transformation of social mobility.⁶⁸ The debate about the use and control of actual woodland spaces in Spenser's time and the social implications of that debate cast

⁶⁶ Terence Clifford-Amos calculates that of the 1596 *Faerie Queene's* 3,727 stanzas (including proems), 738 have forest settings (376). Spenser uses *wood* or *woods* 122 times in the poem, 32 of them in Book 6 (followed by 25 instances each in Books 1 and 3; Book 5 has only nine). Of 66 occurrences of the words *forest* or *forests*, 22 are found in Book 3, followed next by 16 in Book 6. The shady aura of Book 6 is undoubtedly heightened in relation to Book 5, in which no use of the word *forest* appears.

⁶⁷ Corinne Saunders writes that "the work becomes a grand playing out of the war between good and evil for which the forest is the stage" (*Forest* 194-95). Judith Dundas sees the forest as a "stage" for the workings of fortune.

⁶⁸ Stillman notes a general hesitancy toward historical interpretation of Book 6, and in an analysis of the book, *A Present View of the State of Ireland*, and Irish historical contexts, he explores how "the historical dimension of Book Six is both consequential and crucial for understanding Spenser's claims to autonomous poetic vision" (301). He writes that *A Present View* illuminates "those historical needs motivating the construction of Book Six and much about what I have called the conspicuously remote, mythically abstract form in which such needs find expression" (302). Saunders agrees that for Spenser, "the quest through the forest is towards an historical as well as a spiritual ideal" (*Forest* 193).

Spenser's forest as a representation of the decline of aristocratic influence and of the potential for new social ideals. As forests and political power structures began to adapt to the emerging forces of middle-class landowners, a developing market economy, world exploration, and the inklings of commonwealth thought, Spenser's quest through the "great canopy of greenery" (Tonkin, *Spenser's Courteous Pastoral* 179) in the book of courtesy is a quest of history too.

So a nuanced consideration of the forest suggests that the purpose of the first two-thirds of the book goes beyond exercises in courtesy. These cantos depict a decline of aristocratic efficacy that sets up the emergence of Spenser's humble doppelgänger, the shepherd Colin Clout, as the hero's savior of sorts. The forest reveals this decline through its own historicity and intertextuality, and in this way it is implicit in the narrative structure and overall telos of Book 6. A view of the social change played out in Book 6's forests also has implications for understanding Spenser's own career, as Colin Clout's appearance suggests. Rather than searching for a position in the established social hierarchy (Schoenfeldt 155), Spenser, personally invested in the possibilities of social mobility, looks to create a space for the nonnoble poet in a social landscape he recognizes to be changing and whose transformation is signaled by the forests of his poetry and his country.

Book 6 is not an empirical record of English forests, of course, but a literary representation that is also intertextual. Although the historical forest bears upon it, the text presents the forest of romance—so ubiquitous in medieval and early modern literatures, and much like the historical English forest, nearly impossible to characterize. Spenser employs two characters closely tied to the forest, Tristram and Timias, to explore

issues of social change. As squires, they stand poised for noble greatness and represent the potentiality of aristocratic power as its next generation of knights. They also carry with them intertextual legacies in medieval romance: Tristram and Timias have analogues in Sir Thomas Malory's *Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* in the *Morte d'Arthur* (1485) and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), respectively. Spenser alters their characters in ways that bear upon their social progression through the forest. The changes he makes reveal doubt about the social vision and values that traditional romance narratives advance, and the forest allows Spenser to crystallize visions of England's past and evolving present: the past in the form of the literary and social legacy of romance, chivalric ideals, Arthurian legend, and the aristocratic ideology and social hierarchy that found refuge there;⁶⁹ and the contemporary moment in the evolution of English woodland from an exclusive stronghold to a national economic resource cultivated by the middling sort.

Neither Spenser's forest nor the historical forest debate offers an active role for the nobility; the aristocracy are squeezed out, negated by silence. This implication lies latent in Book 6. Formerly the stronghold of the noble, the forest is now the place where future generations of titled men fade away. For while the hero knights of Book 6, Calidore and Arthur, pass through the forest and encounter its challenges of bad men and wild beasts in straightforward fashion, the squires are defined by (and confined in) the woods in ways that reflect the social discourse overshadowing England's forests and the possibilities and doubts raised by a shifting social dynamic. For the knights, the forest is a setting; for the squires, it defines their futures. In Calidore's absence, attention shifts from

⁶⁹ Arnold Williams discusses the strong Elizabethan impulse to read Arthurian romance as a vision of the past (82).

noble glory to the testing of these squires and the question, also being asked about forests in England, of what they would become.

I begin with the first eight cantos of Book 6 and the travails of Timias and Tristram, whose failures signal a fading of romance and its aristocratic values. The remainder of the chapter examines how Spenser fills the social and literary void by offering a resonate ethic of productive activity in his use of georgic tropes and the image of the poet-plowman. By capitalizing on the forest's adaptability to many genres (including romance, pastoral, epic, and georgic) and its affiliation with social rank, Spenser further complicates his explorations of social change. Historical and generic contexts work together to depict the decline of the aristocratic forest and suggest the possibilities of a productive (materially and poetically) social ethic.

Squires in the Aristocratic Forest of Romance

Amorphous and polyvalenced, literary forests contribute to a reading experience that "requires us to be alert, to be ready for the unexpected, the incomplete, the mysterious, the unaccountable" (Northrop 216) and that makes a critical characterization of forests themselves frustrating and fruitless. Aside from the traditional tree catalogue and a few descriptive stanzas about the Wandering Wood in Book 1, Spenser offers few details about his forests, instead following the lead of one of his sources, Thomas Malory, who allows only a "compelling sense of the forest, a connotative reception rather than a mental picture" by never arranging features into "a meaningful landscape" (Firmin 27). Instead, the figures who characterize the space offer better interpretive inroads to the significance of the landscape (R. Rawdon Wilson 666). Given the book of courtesy's

focus on social relations and contemporary debates on the proper societal uses of the forest, I would like to set aside the figure many critics believe “epitomizes Spenser’s forest,” the Blatant Beast, (Saunders, *Forest* 192) in favor of two characters whose socially liminal status mirrors that of the forest and whose fate is intricately tied to it: Tristram, a neophyte made squire by Calidore, and Timias, Arthur’s squire.

Tristram and Timias embody what the forest means to Spenser as a literary inheritance and as a space of malleable social status. Socially liminal squires, striving for a greater title and on the cusp between common and noble status, they become mired in and defined by the forest in a way that reflects the social discourse overshadowing England’s actual forests and the anxieties and possibilities raised by the phenomenon of social mobility. The forest infuses their identities as characters, and they reveal its social and literary possibilities.

Tristram enters the narrative of Book 6 as an exile in the forests of Faeryland and in a moment of social disorder. When Calidore encounters “A tall young man from thence not farre away, / Fighting on foot, as well he him descryde, / Against an armed knight, that did on horsebacke ryde” (6.2.3.7-9), the young man at first appears to be a victim, on foot and attacked by an armed opponent in the saddle. But the full description of Tristram complicates the situation and hints at this unnamed youth’s central predicament:

A goodly youth of amiable grace,
 Yet but a slender slip, that scarce did see
 Yet seventeene yeares, but tall and faire of face
 That sure he deem’d him borne of noble race.

All in a woodmans iacket he was clad
 Of Lincolne greene, belayd with siluer lace;
 And on his head an hood with aglets sprad,

And by his side his hunters horne he hanging had. (6.2.5.2-9)

He wears buskins and carries a boar spear and bow and arrows, and he presents a paradox: a nobleman dressed as a common woodsman. His face and silver lace, glimmers of nobility, belie his disguise in the romance tradition, yet they do not excuse his actions: he has killed the knight. Calidore accuses him of committing a social transgression: “Why hath thy hand too bold it selfe embrewed / In blood of knight, the which by thee is slaine, / By thee no knight; which armes impugneth plaine?” (6.2.7.3-5).

Tristram’s introduction comes hard upon the heels of an explication of social order. Canto 2 opens with a defense of courtesy and hierarchy in which knights and ladies

[...] beare themselues aright

To all of each degree, as doth behoue[.]

For whether they be placed high aboue,

Or low beneath, yet ought they well to know

Their good, that none them rightly may reprove

Of rudenesse, for not yeelding what they owe[.] (6.2.1.3-8)

By this rule, both the knight and the youth stand guilty. Yet the following stanza asserts that although great effort toward noble acts should be praised, only those noble by Nature’s “great helpe” (6.2.2.1) of birth are truly great. The woodsman faces an

insurmountable disadvantage.⁷⁰

Tristram's offense disappears, however, when he explains his motivation and his true status. But before unveiling his identity, he characterizes himself first as a sport hunter: "[I] Doe spend my dayes, and bend my carelesse wit / To saluage chace, where I thereon may hit / In all this forrest, and wyld wooddie raine" (6.2.9.4-6). In the midst of such a hunt, he had stumbled upon a knight abusing a lady, and in her defense, Tristram (as yet unnamed) had shot the knight through like a beast. His bravery, eloquence, and beauty confirm his next claim, that he is a prince. Exiled from Cornwall and hiding from his usurping uncle, he tells a version of the traditional story of his youth. His guilt melts away with this revelation, and Calidore dubs him his squire but does not allow him to join his quest. Instead, Tristram leaves the scene, wearing the dead knight's armor, to bring the knight's lady to safety. He will not appear again, although Michael Schoenfeldt thinks that even without his presence in the narrative, "The anxiety about such class war lingers" (156).⁷¹ Tristram, an adolescent woodsman-prince who ends a squire, poised at a moment of transition, invokes the promising and threatening possibilities of social mobility.

More important than what Tristram does, however, is what he becomes in Spenser's version of his story.⁷² The Tristram whose appearance in *The Faerie Queene*

⁷⁰ Such is the view of Lila Geller, who describes Spenser's "general theory" of social status as insisting upon noble birth as a prerequisite for virtue and all but ruling out virtue for the lowborn. In her interpretation, the dance of the Graces demonstrates that only providence can promote a person of low rank to a higher station. For an opposing view, see Borris.

⁷¹ Schoenfeldt continues this passage, "In its simultaneous celebration of those who rise above their birth and castigation of the upstart, the text of *The Faerie Queene* displays the uneasiness with which Spenser imagines his own capacity to make literature the vehicle of self-improvement" (156).

⁷² Stories of Tristram or Tristan include the courtly romances of Thomas of Britain's Old French *Tristan* (ca. 1160), Gottfried von Straßburg's Middle High German *Tristan* (ca. 1210), the Old Norse prose version *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (ca. 1226), and the late-thirteenth-century Middle English *Sir Tristrem*. Twelfth-

spans less than a canto (37 stanzas) represents a distillation of an entire intertextual romance cycle, closely tied not only to the forest but to the literature and values of chivalry. Tristram “carries his credentials with him out of medieval romance” (Tonkin, *The Faerie Queene* 177) as a celebrated warrior on par with Lancelot, yet in Malory’s version, he also comes laden with the baggage of a troubling literary reputation: a prince without a kingdom, a brazen adulterer who eventually discards his lover, a madman, a violent hothead, and an outsider to established authority. Spenser avoids Tristram’s disturbing traits by predating his narrative to Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, his primary source for Arthurian elements; his Tristram is a young innocent, eager to prove himself and yet to enact the narrative Malory weaves. The only character except Arthur (and possibly the Blatant Beast, a version of Malory’s questing beast) whom Spenser adopts directly from these romance cycles, Tristram brings with him echoes of a literary and social legacy under revision. For the forest representative we have in Spenser’s Tristram is recognizably Malory’s man, yet substantially different in ways that speak directly to his ties to the forest and the social dimension of the wood.

Spenser’s Tristram is primarily a hunter, an identity the writer adopts and develops from Malory’s romance. He tells Calidore that he has spent his youth in the noble sports of hunting and hawking, pursuing a passion “To hunt the saluage chace amongst my peres, / Of all that raungeth in the forrest greene; / Of which none is to me vnknowne, that eu’r was seene” (6.2.31.7-9). He emphasizes his prowess and his knowledge immediately before lobbying to be Calidore’s squire; his hunting expertise

century Norman poet Bérout began a separate “common” strain of the legend, and the so-called *Prose Tristan* (ca. 1250) tied Tristan and Iseult’s story to Arthurian legend. Malory’s adaptation of the prose version and its incorporation in his *Le Morte d’Arthur* as *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* (1485) most likely brought Tristram to Spenser.

marks his worthiness for the socially redemptive opportunity as a squire. Through hunting, Spenser ties him to the socially ambiguous forest and draws on what readers may have already known about the character from Arthurian legend.

Malory's stories had much enhanced the Tristan character's reputation as a hunter, crediting him with not only excelling at the sport but originating the formalized language of aristocratic hunting and creating in its ritual a marker of nobility. In fact, the glowing praise bestowed upon Tristram for his hunting skills is Malory's addition to his source. After relating his birth in the forest and the death of his mother there (details that Spenser omits), Malory explains his education: "And aftir, as he growed in myght and strength, he laboured in huntynge and in hawkyng—never jantylman more that ever we herde rede of," noting of his skill, "And therefore the booke of [venery, of hawkyng and huntyng is called the booke of] sir Trystrams" (232/8.3, brackets in the original).⁷³

Furthermore,

And every day sir Trystram wolde go ryde an-huntyng, for he was called that tyme the chyeff chacer of the worlde and the noblyst blower of an horne of all maner of mesures. For, as bookis reporte, of sir Trystram cam all the good termys of venery and of huntyng, and all the syses and mesures of all blowyng wyth an horne; and of hym we had fyrst all the termys of hawkyng, and whyche were bestis of chace and bestis of venery, and whyche were vermyns; and all the blastis that longed to all maner of game [...] that all maner jantylmen hath cause to the worldes

⁷³ Muriel Whitaker notes Malory's addition and surmises that Tristram's talent in hunting stems from his unusual nativity in the woods, a locale that distinguishes him from other knights (64). Citations from Malory are given first by page number then by the book and chapter numbers of Caxton's printing.

ende to prayse sir Trystram and to pray for his soule. AMEN, SAYDE

SIR THOMAS MALLEORRÉ.⁷⁴ (416/10.52)

Malory's Tristram is not just a hunter, but the founder of aristocratic hunting and its accompanying technical practices and language, codified in the "book" of hunting.⁷⁵ Ostensibly, Spenser's young Tristram can look forward to this feat.

The intertextuality of hunting in Malory's text—his story stems from the *Prose Tristan*, which Malory amends with inflated praise of Tristram's skills, which leads to Tristram's establishment as hunter extraordinaire in the "book" of venery—magnifies the character from his earliest literary life. Although the idea of "the hunt as a complex art" constitutes a defining element of the Tristan story as it appears in the Old French, Old Norse, and Middle High German versions, the tradition of portraying Tristram as a master huntsman was noticeably enlarged in the story's English renditions (Saunders, "Malory's *Book of Huntynge*" 273). Certainly his acumen marks him as noble; hunting as a practice had developed into an exclusive knowledge set of specialized terminology and skills that distinguished medieval courtly sport hunting from common subsistence hunting. Some versions of Tristram's story describe his social elevation when he teaches courtiers how to butcher game properly, a tutorial which in its ceremonial approach to animal dismemberment reveals the nobility of an unknown woodland youth and proves him worthy to enter court. Hunting rites in the Tristan legend "conspicuously draw

⁷⁴ The authenticity of Malory's enthusiastic endorsement, which stems from the Winchester manuscript, has been questioned, but Saunders believes that even if of scribal origin, it suggests knowledge of Malory's personal esteem for hunting ("Malory's *Book of Huntynge*" 272).

⁷⁵ Some early modern writers accepted Tristram's authorship as literal, as did Sir Thomas Cockaine in his 1591 *A Short Treatise of Hunting*, in which he writes to his "gentlemen readers," "It hath bin long receiued for a truth, that Sir Tristram, one of King Arthures Knights, was the first writer and (as it were) the founder of the exact knowledge of the honorable and delightfull sport of hunting; whose tearmes in Hunting, Hawking, and measures of blowing, I hold to be the best and fittest to be vsed" (A₃r). Editor W. R. Halliday believes that a book of Tristram's "lawes" must have circulated, although he could not trace it (ix).

boundaries of cultural prestige and power” (Marvin 133). Malory’s figuring of Tristram as the originator of hunting knowledge, language, and practice makes him not just a skilled hunter, but a founder of hunting as a marker of nobility that distinguishes the gentlemen from the poachers. Tristram makes the forest of the hunt a space for aristocratic affirmation and display.

Malory creates in Tristram the founder of the English hunting tradition, and Spenser clearly embraces this tradition in *The Faerie Queene*; yet he also gains from Malory the inklings of danger and social decline inherent in the character. Some critics have seen Malory’s Tristram as a “counter-hero” and a catalyst of moral decay who signals the decline of Arthurian society, a representative of “rule by a system of brute force” opposing Lancelot, Arthur’s agent of just rule (Fries 606). Malory does expose his knight to criticism. He fails to defend Tristram’s adulterous love with Isode as he does Lancelot’s with Guinevere. Tristram’s eagerness to fight (he alone rivals Lancelot in martial prowess) is skewered by Dynadan, who, cajoled into fighting against his will, complains of Tristram’s often unbridled and unreasoned urge to arms (313/9.24). Malory’s Tristram instigates conflict out of puerile impatience, boredom, or an anxious need to gain worship sufficient to earn him entry to Arthur’s court. Yet he also clings to his outsider identity as Cornish and as a rogue openly defiant of King Mark and at times perversely inclined to deny an increasingly interested Arthur the honor of his name at the Round Table. Tristram is an exalted knight, but with chinks in his honor if not his armor.

Perhaps taking a cue from Malory, then, Spenser admits the darker resonances of the Tristram figure. Spenser contributes to his story a brief moment of seeming rebellion in the woods that foreshadows Tristram’s transgressive actions as an adult in Malory’s

text and, in the context of *The Faerie Queene*, instills in his character a status ambiguity, particularly resonant in a time of social mobility, that places in one character a woodsman-prince who kills a knight. But Spenser's most significant change effectively debilitates Tristram: he omits a key element of Tristan's legend, his prowess as a musician. In fact, the first quotation from Malory's text given above, about Tristram's early education, begins like this: "And so Trystrams lerned to be an harper passyng all other, that there was none suche called in no contrey. And so in harpyng and on instrumentys of musyke in his youthe he applyed hym for to lerne" (232/8.3). His first talent lies in music, and his renown for harping is as great as that for his hunting. Throughout Malory's story, Tristram's musical ability marks significant moments. The damsel who helps him in his madness knows to bring him, in addition to food and drink, a harp, for as she says, "for of goodly harpyng he beryth the pryse of the worlde" (304/9.18). He is consequently brought to his senses by the beauty of his own music.⁷⁶ His death comes in music when Mark stabs him as he plays the harp for Isode (666/19.11). Perhaps only Orpheus surpasses Tristram's reputation for music in medieval literature, and *Sir Orfeo* may have inspired Malory's emphasis on Tristram's musical talent.⁷⁷ Other writers of Tristan legends emphasize his reputation as an artist.⁷⁸ Yet Spenser deprives his Tristram of music entirely, reassigning it to the shepherd Colin Clout in canto 10.

This appropriation of music allows Spenser to disrupt the exiled prince's return to royal favor. In denying him music, Spenser demotes Tristram by relegating him to the

⁷⁶ Saunders notes that in Malory's sources, a lady's skill at the harp recovers Tristram's sanity (*Forest* 175).

⁷⁷ Tonkin sees the Orpheus story underlying Book 6, primarily in the Mount Acidale episode (*Spenser's Courteous Pastoral*, 215–16). We see the setup for it here in canto 2 in the denial of music to Tristram.

⁷⁸ See, for example, W. T. H. Jackson.

woods and blocking his path to court, leaving him to wander the aristocratic space of the romance forest yet never to reach fulfillment in the power center that the forest serves. His Tristram never enters court, and although recognized by Calidore as a rightful prince, he progresses only to the low rank of squire; the breach created by his missing harp suggests that he will not advance. Hunting is art enough to establish his merit but not to bring him to recognition at court or to knighthood in the aristocratic model of advancement. For hunting, unlike music, takes place in the wilderness retreat of the noble, not to be practiced in the inner sanctum of court (where Malory's Tristram often plays for Isode) or in pursuit of other refined activities required of the chivalric knight, such as courtship. Spenser's figure is confined to the dark shadowy coverts where prey hide and limited to being a practitioner of forest violence. His violence is sanctioned when conducted within the strictures of chivalric code, but Tristram's vocation limits him socially. Restricted to the kill, he enacts what Schoenfeldt sees as Spenser's fascination with the violence necessary to uphold the social hierarchy (152), but he cannot rise in that hierarchy.

He cannot rise because, missing his harp, Spenser's Tristram lacks the Orphic power of transcendence ascribed to the mystery-infused production of music. Hunting, even in its ceremonial courtly practice, is visceral and earthy, a demonstration of human domination reserved for aristocratic sport. That Tristram is denied his famous musical talent deprives him of the ethereal and Neoplatonic powers of music to raise the individual above an earthly existence. Music holds the power and possibility of transcendence on a cosmic scale, demonstrated on Mount Acidale in the achievement of ideal Petrarchan love, the graduation of maiden to Grace to Venus, the assumption of a

shepherdess to the rank of queen, and, as Elizabeth J. Bellamy notes, the connection of the *silva* to the divine (180). In Malory's text, Tristram's music restores him from bestial madness to celebrated knighthood, and at his death, harp in hand, it may suggest his Christian salvation. Spenser's Tristram lacks the means for ascendancy, spiritual or social, and in the course of Book 6 does not rise to knighthood or anything beyond; instead, Colin Clout "orchestrates all of prime matter and its numinous deities" through his piping in the divinely infused *silva* of Mount Acidale (Bellamy 178).

Spenser's teenage Tristram is a reduced version of Malory's problematic hero distilled to hunting skills and budding combat ability, a newly named squire poised for greatness in the hierarchical social system in which he aspires to power yet deprived of those talents by which he could ascend. Malory creates in Tristram a celebrated master of the arts of chivalry, yet a potentially untrustworthy holder of such power; Spenser adopts the hero-hunter element of Malory's character, but denies him the role of Orphic musician, curtailing his potential. He becomes a squire but never a knight, and although noble, he will not hold real power or influence. Spenser's character is an acknowledgement of the power of the aristocratic rank but indicates pessimism about its continuing efficacy. Tristram's failure does not indict the forest itself, but his relegation to it indicates the insufficiency of the feudal values it embodies and the misguided idealization of these values in Spenser's contemporary culture. In the confusion of social identity and status mobility—the middling sort, for example, could comprise both wealthy merchants and the gentry's younger sons—such clear-cut idealized structures no longer serve.

By reserving musical agency for Colin Clout, Spenser deprives the woodland squire of the power of transcendence, granting it instead to a lowly shepherd-poet to be practiced on a pastoral mount. The music denied Tristram flows from a shepherd whose piping makes it possible for Calidore to resume his quest, although the impossibility of forever restraining the Blatant Beast hints at a disappointing fruitlessness in chivalry. Although he hints that Tristram's story will be taken up later, like many other narratives halted *in medias res*, Spenser never completes Tristram's story and leaves him forever a woodland squire. Spenser's character resembles Malory's Tristram, then, who, though a knight, strives to earn worship enough for a place at the Round Table, and because of his love cannot comfortably sit at Mark's. Neither Tristram fully enters society. His fate as a child of the forest is important for understanding the doubt Spenser begins to show in the socially contentious forest space, the genre of romance, and the aristocratic dominance they both represent. Unfulfilled and unfinished, Tristram had the potential to be a great knight but instead fades silently into the forest, aristocratic but no longer relevant. Another squire, the experienced and promising Timias, whose roots lie in the Italian romance tradition, depicts more decisively the stagnation suggested by Tristram's stunted development.

Timias holds from the outset a prestigious role as squire to Arthur, the poem's hero, agent of grace, avatar of magnanimity, and mythic progenitor of the Tudor monarchs. He begins admirably in *The Faerie Queene*, described at his introduction as "A gentle youth, his dearely loued Squire" (1.7.37.1) who carries Arthur's spear, handles the magic hunting horn, and defends his lord. Often referred to simply as "Squire," Timias is a faithful and capable practitioner of knightly prowess and ideals, a knight-in-

training devoted to his lord and a believer in chivalry, as “trew and faithfull euer tride, / And bold, as euer Squyre that waited by knights side” (3.5.12.8-9). He shows every indication of achieving a high level of honor. If royal parentage and noble skills gird Tristram’s potential, a close relationship with his renowned lord underwrites Timias’s. This squire begins with every advantage and with an inside track to advancement, but even more decisively than Tristram, falls into silence and isolation; rather than simply fading away, Timias will fail at social advancement.

Like Tristram, Timias is closely tied to the forest. His reputation as a skilled hunter leads Defetto, Decetto, and Despetto to bait him with the Blatant Beast in Book 6: “For well they wist, that Squire to be so bold, / That no one beast in forrest wyld or tame, / Met him in chase, but he it challenge would” (5.15.6-8). In fact, the defining moment that frees his character from sidekick status is a familiar clash of forest antagonists: the hunter against the foresters. In the first canto of Book 3, Arthur gives chase after the fleeing Florimell while Timias challenges the “Foster” who chases her. This forester enlists his two brothers to ambush Timias in the forest, but Timias kills all three. However, he does not escape unscathed. Languishing with a wound in the thigh, he is rescued and healed by the huntress Belpheobe (associated with the forest since her conception in one), who stumbles upon him in the middle of a hunt. Belpheobe had earlier been described as “A goodly Ladie clad in hunters weed” (2.3.21.7) of leather buskins and carrying a boar spear, a bow, and arrows (2.3.21-31). In her bower in the forest, she cures Timias of his wound, and he falls in love with her.

Timias’s clash with the foresters is his first stumble in a deluded adherence to chivalry. He defends a lady, yet unwittingly he pursues lust for the purposes of defeating

it, only to be caught unawares in an ambush that afflicts him with transgressive desire for the chaste Belphebe. He comes away injured because, as Lauren Silberman notes, he erroneously applies the ideals of chivalry to a corrupt world and falls into “the peril of treating ideals as a simple model of how to behave” (38). In a poem engaged in a campaign of fashioning gentlemen, Timias’s injury here warns against the unexamined adoption of idealized models of conduct.

The forester episode also reveals the squire’s flawed perception and inability to understand the complexities of his identity as a forest squire. Silberman shows how Timias fails to see the meaning of the lustful Foster in an allegorical context. In the context of the royal forest, the episode figures Timias as a Robin Hood character, a (sometimes) noble hunter who turns outlaw to resist the corruption which was a common complaint about forest administration and its officers.⁷⁹ As such, Timias acts as both outlaw and judge, resisting authority yet simultaneously punishing sin. But he does not understand the ambiguity of his role. He does not recognize himself as a figure who reveals flaws in the social system in the way that Robin Hood stories seek to uncover and correct injustices within it. Spenser’s hint of the outlaw legend marks his awareness of the gulf between idealized social models and lived ones at the same time it reveals his character’s blindness.

For despite his rough run-in with the foresters, near-sighted Timias continues to revert to a model of chivalric knighthood and, true to romance tradition, eventually goes mad in the woods. During a hunting expedition, Belphebe spurns Timias in a jealous fit

⁷⁹ Marvin quotes Adam of Eynsham’s early thirteenth-century biography of St. Hugh of Lincoln: “The worst abuse in the kingdom of England was the tyranny of the foresters” (151). Manwood too alludes to complaints about corruption among forest officials who lined their pockets by means of bribery and extortion (202).

over Amoret, and he attempts to talk his way out of her anger with “framed speaches fit for his behoofe” (4.7.37.7). Despite its eloquence, his speech fails. When Belpheobe threatens to shoot him, he withdraws to the woods and into madness:

At last when long he follow'd had in vaine,
 Yet found no ease of grieffe, nor hope of grace,
 Vnto those woods he turned backe againe,
 Full of sad anguish, and in heauy case:
 And finding there fit solitary place
 For wofull wight, chose out a gloomy glade,
 Where hardly eye mote see bright heauens face,
 For mossy trees, which couered all with shade
 And sad melancholy: there he his cabin made. (4.7.38)

He follows the traditional dictates of the mad lover recluse, well-developed by other noble madmen such as Lancelot, Tristan, and Orpheus: he breaks his weapons, ceases to speak, eats only the fruits of the forest, grows physically unrecognizable, and carves his beloved's name into the trees. When Arthur again encounters him, the knight mistakes his squire for a “woodman” despite signs of nobility and leaves him forlorn (4.7.42-47). Although Timias eventually reconciles with Belpheobe, the forest has marked him.⁸⁰

Timias fumbles in his earnest attempts to live by chivalric ideals, and his literary ancestry itself casts doubt on those ideals. Timias and Belpheobe's story finds an

⁸⁰ Reed Way Dasenbrock attributes Timias's romantic failure to a combination of the squire's low social status and the Petrarchan paradox of obligatory yet unrequited devotion. Studying four squires in Books 3 and 4 (Timias, Squire of Dames, Amyas, and Placidus), he argues that their inferior status means they cannot untangle themselves from the “Petrarchan bind” because they must be socially and romantically subservient.

analogue in Ariosto's story of Angelica, Medoro, and Orlando in *Orlando Furioso* (1532).⁸¹ Angelica, queen of Cathay, flees through the forest from a bevy of lovers, including count Orlando. Near a battlefield she stumbles upon a young foot soldier, Medoro, who has been injured in an attempt to recover his slain king's body. She pities him, cures him, and falls in love with him. They consummate their love and marry. When Orlando finds writing on forest trees proclaiming their love, he goes mad in the woods and terrorizes the countryside.

The elements Spenser borrows from Ariosto are apparent: a lady fleeing through the forest, the beautiful youth injured in a fight and healed by a highborn woman, names carved in trees, a love triangle, and passionate madness in the woods. Important differences in how Spenser uses these elements, adapting and revising the plot and the roles of the characters, contribute to the cracks in the ideal romance veneer of Timias's story.⁸² Spenser streamlines the plot and effectively eliminates the love triangle by making Amoret an unwitting instigator. He purifies the sexual passion of Ariosto's story to the level of courtly devotion and couches it in storylines that, in threatening chastity, heighten its importance. Finally, he creates in Timias a composite of Medoro and Orlando.

A literary lineage that blends both characters—a lowly foot soldier noble in heart and deeds, *and* a revered knight who falls into raving madness—undercuts Timias's idealism further. Such a legacy reveals in Timias an uncertainty that weakens his social potential in *The Faerie Queene* and introduces, in Ariosto's playfully sardonic spirit, a

⁸¹ The links between these two storylines were first traced by R. E. Neil Dodge.

⁸² Paul J. Alpers locates Spenser's interest in Ariosto not in character per se, but "in a more or less conventional figure who is in a poetically interesting situation" (194).

pessimistic cutting edge to the aristocratic endeavor of chivalry itself. Although Timias stands below Belphoebe socially, as Medoro does to Angelica, he has it in him to be the renowned Orlando.⁸³ But he will not advance. A large part of Timias's character is that of a common soldier, naïve and reckless in his grasping at chivalric codes, unable to understand the mythic nature of the model he attempts to emulate. In the legacy of intemperate Orlando lurk doubts about the social consequences and even the real existence of such ideal modes. Orlando's great violence is comparable in *The Faerie Queene* to that wreaked by Talus or the Salvage Man, and his violent passion for Angelica equates him with other men who chase women through Spenser's woods, such as the Foster and Lust. Finally, as a model of social behavior, Orlando is not an Arthur, not a type by which "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline" ("Letter to Raleigh"), because he is clearly a hero of *mock* courtly romance. The fanciful story in which the mad Orlando's wits are recovered from the moon reminds readers that Ariosto has no intention of presenting his story as a version of history or a guide to civil behavior. Timias's legacy emerges from Ariosto's forest laden with the weaknesses of Medoro's social standing and that of the model he pursues, Arthur's *and* Orlando's.⁸⁴

⁸³ Contemporary commentaries on *Orlando Furioso* commonly bemoan the disparity in rank between Angelica and Medoro as shameful; see Alpers, 187.

⁸⁴ Arthur is a clear contrast to Orlando. For example, note that Spenser has *Arthur* read the beloved's name carved on the trees by Timias, and he passes by in temperate pity. His momentary incursion into this episode reinforces his polarity to Ariosto's Orlando and the significance of Orlando's madness as subsumed in Timias. Regarding history, Andrew V. Ettin aligns Spenser and Virgil (explicitly excluding Ariosto) in projects whose political and historical implications require "working on real soil, working on material to which they have some sort of responsibility because it exists independent of their shaping" (64).

By the time he reenters the narrative in Book 6, Timias has been initiated into the forest but not, as some characters are, strengthened by it.⁸⁵ As he follows the path of knighthood, of both Arthur and Orlando, Timias fails to fulfill the expectations of the social model they represent (in varying degrees of earnestness). Two characteristics mark Timias's experience from the time of his withdrawal into the forest: speechlessness and chivalric failure. Excepting an eloquent outburst to Belphoebe at the time of their reconciliation (4.8.13-17), Timias remains textually silent from the time of his madness in the woods. He never again speaks a word of dialogue in *The Faerie Queene*; even when reunited with Arthur in Book 6, Timias's grief and shame keep him silent. In a book advocating the virtue of courtesy, Timias's silence effectively removes him from active society according to the Ciceronian notion, explored by Spenser in the April eclogue of *The Shepherdes Calendar*, that civilized society depends on members possessing both wisdom and eloquence (Berger 46). Patrick Cheney notes the "rhetorical symbolism of eloquence as virtuous power" in the bejeweled dove that reconciles Timias and Belphoebe in the forest in Book 4, yet that power fails Timias from that moment on (142).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Donald Cheney shows that the wilderness of Book 6 tests the abilities of men who must defend their society from dangers that emerge from the same natural world (195). Timias, however, is not one of these men.

⁸⁶ John Rooks believes that Timias can speak, but chooses to shed speech as "just another social form that he puts off" (146) in his despondency. Yet Timias's encounter with Arthur in the woods suggests inability, not choice. When Arthur, who does not recognize his squire, speaks to him, Timias

[...] answered no whit,
 But stood still mute, as if he had beene dum,
 Ne signe of sence did shew, ne common wit,
 As one with grieffe and anguise ouercum,
 And vnto euery thing did aunswere mum[.] (4.7.44.1-5)

Additionally, Timias's speechlessness extends beyond his episode of madness in the woods. I believe that Timias's initial silence is not a choice but an inability to perform verbally at a level expected for influence in society, especially at court—a skill exemplified by Calidore, whose "gracious speach, did steale mens hearts away" (6.1.2.6). In fact, in Timias's decline into madness, the only thing he chooses is the forest

His silence is a sign of his downward spiral, a symptom of social debilitation, for although the loss of his power of expression may originate in grief, chivalric failure compounds it. Over the course of Book 6 alone, Timias is wounded by the Blatant Beast and nearly overcome by Defetto, Decetto, and Despetto; abandoned by Arthur as a faltering invalid at a hermit's lodge; and captured, whipped, and dragged at the end of a rope by Disdain and Scorn. His transformation turns regressive; he shrinks from a knight-in-training of eloquence and ability to a silent squire whose shame, ineptitude, and poor judgment lead him to withdraw from Arthur until Arthur must rescue him, more than once, from humiliating situations. It is perhaps fitting that he is replaced in canto 5 by the Salvage Man—a man also without speech, but secretly noble, fiercely loyal, and a fighting dynamo—as Arthur's companion in arms and quest. Timias's prospects for a knighthood seem doubtful. Keenly aware of how far he has fallen, suffering without words of his own and subject to public vitriol, he must depend on the narrator to report his state of mind: "Words sharpely wound, but greatest grieffe of scorning growes" (6.7.49.9).

Spenser gains from Ariosto a skeptical undertone that allows him to criticize an aristocratic social model yet avoid the despair and fatalism of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. He adapts Ariosto's story to the consequential tone of his national epic and of English romance in general, as typified by Malory's faith in heroic values if not in the viability of chivalric society. In creating in Timias a composite of Medoro and Orlando, Spenser identifies his potential paths as a *boy* passively inheriting nobility or as a *knight* actively

(4.7.38.6, quoted above). While we know that Timias speaks again (for example, he and Arthur "some gracious speeches spent" after Timias's rescue from Defetto, Decetto, and Despetto [6.5.24.6]), Spenser never again reports his words after his speech to Belphebe. He is textually silent.

cultivating it. The lingering resonance of Orlando's madness is disturbing in its implications about the unreliability of an aristocratic oligarchy and about its myths of chivalric knighthood. That Timias cannot graduate from the status of squire signals the fading of knighthood—of a historically obsolete dream of feudal aristocracy if not of the aristocracy itself—as a viable model for personal advancement or societal efficacy. The quest of knighthood, as represented by the squires' hope for title *and* the mission of Calidore to secure the Blatant Beast, is unfulfilled. Bellamy's characterization of the book's hero, "bungling Calidore, a failed *initiate*" (187, italics mine) figures him also as a novice whose unfinished work must be taken up by the Round Table knights Sir Pelleas and Sir Lamorak (6.12.39). His success in capturing the beast is fleeting, as the opportunities of knighthood elude the squires.

Calidore's bursting back into the narrative and "into the open fields" of the shepherd community in canto 9 (6.9.4.1) marks an abrupt transition that again prompts the question: What is the purpose of the first two-thirds of the book? And what does the forest as a setting do for Book 6? I have examined the forest as a socially significant space in both its historical context in early modern England and its literary legacy as Spenser inherited it in medieval romance. Manwood might appreciate the forest of the first eight cantos, reminiscent as it is of royal forests reserved for the benefit of the elite. Even the seemingly lowborn have backstories of nobility to justify their presence. It is Tristram's royal forest of Faery (without the intrusive poor who historically lived, traveled, and worked in royal forests) where knights and ladies encounter other knights and ladies on the playground and battleground of the noble, and men indulge in the "aristocratic addiction" of the hunt (Fitter, "The Slain Deer" 199). There are scant few

commoners in Book 6's forest, and even the hermit who heals Serena and Timias seems "some goodly person, and of gentle race" (6.5.36.7).⁸⁷ Though it has been suggested by Donald Cheney that this homogeneous social makeup elides rank in an attempt "to eliminate the aspect of social distinctions which interferes with the free flow of courtesy" (210 n. 15), I believe that Spenser's deliberately upscale forest is not the result of an equalizing impulse to erase status but an intensifying or concentrating of the aristocratic flavor of the space. As a refined version of its chivalric romance antecedents (where commons are more numerous) on which the Tudor establishment based its own myths, it allows a more incisive commentary on that social ideal.

As part of that commentary, the squires of Book 6 are as ineffective representatives of the chivalric code as they are fitting representatives of the elite forest. Timias's nature is shaped by a madness in the woods that traditionally indicates noble feeling and courtly love, and Tristram founds and embodies the sport of gentlemen. But they are otherwise failures at nobility in *The Faerie Queene*: Timias's ineptitude at combat in the last half of the poem makes him a comical figure whose shame silences him, and Tristram leaves the poem a newly made squire but will not fulfill the potential of his name. His installation as squire, although a step toward knighthood, is in its humbleness a slight to his royalty; the text frequently adorns the title "squire" with the descriptor "of low degree," echoing the middle English romance of that name (ca. 1555–

⁸⁷ An exception to the lack of lowborn people in the woods would be the Salvage Nation, a contained embodiment of the perceived threat posed by the mass of lawbreakers that the higher echelons envisioned lurking in the forest. See also Heather Dubrow's discussion of cultural conceptions of thievery in Book 6 and fears of the infiltration of foreign "others," such as the Irish-like cannibals of the Salvage Nation ("A Doubtfull Sense of Things").

60).⁸⁸ Reduced to women's escorts and excluded from their lords' quests, Timias and Tristram lack the performative powers necessary to attain a higher social status in Book 6 and expected of influential men at the Elizabethan court.⁸⁹ The squires' blocked advance suggests that Spenser distrusts the aristocratic dominance encoded in romance and underpinning the myths of Elizabethan court ideology and social structure. By identifying Timias and Tristram with an aristocratic wilderness, by depriving them of their voices and music, by holding them to the status of squire-escorts, by making them fighters and no more, Spenser reserves for others—including nonnoble others—the potential influence they represent.⁹⁰

For himself he claims the power of poetry, of expression and transcendence. His experience of the social hierarchy includes the lukewarm reception of his work at court and his struggles in a system of literary patronage dependent on aristocratic favor and its politics (as the final lines of Book 6 reveal). William Oram surmises that in writing epic, Spenser relied on a courtly audience that snubbed his aspirations and declined his overtures, leaving him to dream of a future readership that would judge more fairly. More

⁸⁸ See for example Timias's crisis of confidence in his relationship with Belphoebe, in which he calls himself "a meane Squyre, of meeke and lowly place, / She heuenly borne, and of celestiall hew" (3.5.47.3-4), or Aemelia's lament, "It was my lot to loue a gentle swaine, / Yet was he but a Squire of low degree" (4.7.15.6-7), which occurs immediately before Timias's breach with Belphoebe and his madness. About the declining cultural capital of the title of esquire in Spenser's day, see Lawrence Stone. Stone notes that the title, meant for a select few who included knights' sons, became a commodity as did knighthoods themselves. He quotes a Hugh Beeston, who accompanied the Earl of Essex to Cadiz, as joking that "he hath ben a scabd squire a great while, and could now be content to be a paltry knight the rest of his time" (72-73). Michael Murrin notes, however, that this perceived decline did not prevent those who wanted to benefit from social mobility to accept the title and that Spenser himself became such a parvenu in 1595 (12).

⁸⁹ About the complexities of social codes and the performance of status at court, see Frank Whigham.

⁹⁰ His reservations (in both senses) may have as much to do with the reading public as poetic conviction. Spenser's readership spanned the economic and social spectrum. Many were of the wealthy merchant class rising in influence, emulating features of aristocratic culture while they accumulated wealth worthy of aristocrats. The very use of Ariosto hints at a readership that included an urban mercantile class, notes William J. Kennedy (55). Murrin notes that educated but not exclusively aristocratic readers drove popular taste in and translation of romance (2-9).

generally, John Huntington believes that poets of lower social status, including Spenser, slyly allude to a Christian code of universal nobility while carefully catering to aristocratic patrons. For them, “writing poetry at this moment and in this fashion becomes a claim for a social respect” (88). The degree to which Spenser’s social criticism is personal requires speculation; on the other hand, Spenser’s play with social status in *The Faerie Queene* may also be seen as part and parcel of commonly held ideas about the original nobility of all humankind and its general decline after the Fall. Kenneth Borris understands the poem as operating under the enabling cover of allegory, arguing for “the poet’s allegorical promotion of inner heroism and a meritocracy of virtue” that undermines logical justification for a social hierarchy (7).

I agree that by the time he wrote Book 6, Spenser had come to question the aristocratic model of literary patronage and social influence as the *only* avenue of advancement, personal or national. Its forest reveals a social criticism that has a specific referent in England, one more specific than a general allegorical significance. Spenser’s forest suggests new possibilities akin to Standish’s project for England’s woodlands, a course of action in which Spenser’s squires would be ill-equipped to succeed. Standish’s forest would be managed by forward-looking landowners invested in woodland production, many of whom were also importing and exporting goods, forming trading companies, and collaborating on agricultural “improvement.”⁹¹ Yet, although the middling sort admired aristocratic culture, they yearned for the aristocratic culture of old, of romance knights rather than the contemporary generation of administrative courtiers, Michael Murrin argues. He isolates a telling trait: “They still believed in adventure” (16).

⁹¹ Standish foreshadows the work of John Beale and John Evelyn in the late seventeenth century, for example.

Spenser provides adventure and a criticism of an aristocratic social model in *The Faerie Queene*. The literary and historical forest helps us see how Spenser portrays aristocratic social forms in the first two-thirds of Book 6, only to allude, through the forest setting, to the pressures on these forms. For in the first eight cantos, Sir Turpine is demoted, Calepine flounders, and two promising squires fade away. These incidents have to do with courtesy and merit, but they also suggest a wavering confidence in chivalry and the fading of noble leadership, mirrored by the absence of the aristocracy in the historical debate over the future of English woodlands. The forest fates of these characters make way for the entrance of the lowly poet who can provide both adventure and a national vision.

Admittedly, Spenser may mourn the passing of a golden age, an honest “plaine Antiquitie” that proves his world “all but fayned shoves” (6.Pr.4.7-8). In a similar strain, he writes in the proem to Book 5, “Such oddes I finde twixt those, and these which are, / As that, through long continuance of his course, / Me seemes the world is runne quite out of square” (1.5-7). His lament has class implications; to “runne quite out of square” literally refers to the tools of the craftsman and figuratively communicates disorder, but it also invokes *squire*, an alternative spelling of *square* sharing its etymology and which Spenser uses elsewhere in the poem.⁹² But the forest of squires has proven unproductive and unprogressive in a way that denies already emerging developments in social mobility and economic wealth; instead, Spenser converts adventure to action and places a growing emphasis on productive activity in the final books of *The Faerie Queene*.

⁹² For Spenser’s other use of the word in this sense, see 2.1.58.1.

A Fork in the Path: Spenser's Forest and Genre

The first two-thirds of Book 6 reveal that the forest of romance no longer produces nobility for Spenser, and the narrative leaves the umbrage of the wood for the sunny pastures of pastoral. As romance has failed and courtly pastoral proves inadequate to Spenser's poetic vision, the end of Book 6 faces a fork in the path about a way forward, generically and socially. The forest of squires has proven unproductive and exclusionary in a way that denies social developments in status mobility and economic wealth; the forest of the farmer bridges the gap between values of heroic adventure to productive action. The georgic gloss of Book 6 suggests the transition from the chivalric romance model of noble forests to the innovations of the nonnoble landowner and the beginnings of a campaign of national "improvement" that in the later seventeenth century looked to maximize the productivity of English lands, including forests.

Cantos 9–12 are well-trodden, receiving the majority of scholarly attention given Book 6. My interest lies in the intersection of social status and genre in the forest. How does the syncretic forest of Book 6 complicate the social affinities implied in particular genres, namely the aristocratic values of high romance and pastoral and the lowliness of labor in georgic? Replacing the armed knight in the forest, the supreme icon of the heroic romance genre (Whitaker 53), at the end of Book 6 is a piping poet on a tree-lined hilltop, and that poet must now find a new path forward. By the time Colin Clout emerges and the forest squires fade, the poet and Calidore face a crossroads in the collision of romance with pastoral which introduces, by way of genre, possibilities quietly percolating until now.

The traceable generic contours of Book 6 are convoluted.⁹³ Writes Andrew Ettin, “Spenser’s pastoral-within-georgic sixth book is the culmination of the poem’s movement through genres” (69). His attempt at a label for the book, “pastoral-within-georgic,” reveals the difficulty in pinning down its generic character and neglects the romance of the first eight cantos. Yet by canto 9 the long absence of the book’s hero and the failure of the squires signals the end of romance as strongly as Calidore’s stumbling upon a group of shepherds. Undeveloped threads of romance “made to flaunt their irrelevance” in the book, such as Matilda’s story of infertility, signal “a progressive flawing in the romance world” (Berger 39), the inevitable end capped by the failure of Calidore, who “far from redeeming the failure of the court, actually sums it up in his person” (Neuse 345). Tonkin maintains that Spenser cultivates a love of landscape in Book 6 that suggests a rejection of heroic values (*The Faerie Queene* 28) and a desire for a different approach, but he falls back upon pastoral as the solution. He sees two subtexts to Book 6: “One is chivalric, and ultimately it fails. The other is pastoral, and its vision of harmony, of order restored, of the return of spring, is greater than any other in the poem. The failure against the Blatant Beast is matched, perhaps exceeded, by the success of Pastorella’s restoration” (189).

Yet the limitations of the aristocratic model exist in pastoral too, and Meliboe’s sophistic justifications for a life of pleasurable withdrawal points to the poet’s anxiety in Book 6 about *dulce non utile* (P. Cheney 272), an aristocratic vice. The poem swerves

⁹³ Traditional genres, encumbered by custom or inherent politics, prove too restrictive to Spenser’s project of depicting England’s mythic past in *The Faerie Queene*, claims Bart Van Es (210). Genre, weighted as it is in an Elizabethan social context, provides a way to navigate and negotiate a social position for himself within a changing social landscape. Van Es writes specifically about the influence of chorography on the episode of the marriage of the Thames and the Medway in Book 4.

back to aristocratic values in its revelation of Pastorella's nobility, but pastoral also proves unproductive. Pastorella *is* restored to her place as a princess, but Spenser defers her union with Calidore as he defers Una's with Red Cross, leaving no certainty of a future and an heir. Pastoral, like the chivalric romance it follows in Book 6, dead ends, and the book's final concerns lie with the poet and his own uncertain status in English society and history. Spenser's veiled reference, ostensibly to Burghley, in his reference to the "mighty Peres displeasure" (6.12.41.6) and his directive to his verse to "keep better measure, / And seeke to please" (6.12.41.8-9) envision a futurity implicit in the exercise of epic, nation-building, and poetic fame in which the gift of *The Faerie Queene* to his queen is engaged.

How does Book 6 move from romance to pastoral and back to the project of epic, and what does the progress through genres suggest about the role of the poet and his middling sort in England? Ettin's sense of "pastoral-within-georgic" recognizes the overall influence of georgic. But the privileging of pastoral in the mixed genre of Book 6 has meant a general neglect of its georgic elements and the social implications of the genre as it emerges, like the poet, to fullness at the end of the poem. Additionally, georgic addresses the historical uncertainty faced by the transformation of England's forests, as expressed by Manwood's and Standish's opposing formulations of the forest, and offers a glimpse of the role of the forest in social change. The productive action of georgic poetry bridges the other genres *and* provides a purpose for both poet and forest in the continuing narrative of English history.

The forest, not exclusive to the romance genre, remains after the dismissal of romance in Book 6, appearing occasionally in the final cantos to harbor the tiger that

attacks Pastorella and to provide stately protection to Mount Acidale. Various associations with pastoral (in its idyllic, Edenic incarnation) and georgic (in its associations with hunting and difficult labor), the forest straddles genres and contributes to the blending of these particular two literary forms. Alistair Fowler notes in his essay “Georgic and Pastoral” that “pastoral” as a blanket term is often laid over georgic poetry (84) and that English pastoral in particular is marked by a blending with georgic themes (85). He sees this mixture as an intermediary state as the two genres were gradually transposed on a literary hierarchy of genres over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with georgic emerging as a celebrated genre in the eighteenth century (87). Understandably, then, given the blending of genres and the shape-shifting nature of the forest itself, William Sessions may categorize Spenser’s woods as pastoral spaces (228) while Andrew Wallace implies they are georgic.

Studies of georgic in the period have concentrated on identifying its specifically early modern characteristics and contours in comparison with the high points of the genre, generally taken to be translations of Virgil’s *Georgics* and the English Augustan age. Anthony Low credits Spenser’s work as one of the few “traces of georgic” in the Virgilian tradition in sixteenth-century English literature (33). Challenging Low’s Virgilian formulation are critics who argue for a more expansive definition of georgic, one that includes the legacy of Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (Fowler, “Beginnings”), recognizes the economic drivers that made georgic attractive (McRae), and examines the historical force of georgic as a representation, in Sessions’s words, of “human cultivation of the processes of time” (203) toward political and literary ends. Such an encompassing definition of georgic allows a study of Book 6 as infused with georgic impulses rather

than merely laced with georgic imagery, and it helps us see how the forest works with genre to communicate a social vision. My interest in the georgic element of Book 6 lies in its implied vision of social inclusion in the work of the nation, its tempering effect on aristocratic domination, and its adoption by the first-person narrator in expressing the views of the poet.

Georgic shares enough elements with both pastoral and romance to allow Spenser to meld it with the dominant genres of Book 6, yet its differences prove useful to both the poet and his social vision. Georgic shares with pastoral humble characters, rural landscapes, and a cyclic rhythm of season or song. Hesiodic georgic shares with romance a digressive structure (Fowler, “Beginnings” 111) and an emphasis on unceasing struggle.⁹⁴

But while these genres may be miscible, as Fowler argues, they do not coalesce. We can isolate strains of georgic by the distinguishing elements that separate it from pastoral and romance: its celebration of the truly humble man, its close association with the poet’s own voice, and its emphasis on productive action. The georgic touches Spenser applies to Book 6 through the narrator’s voice and the proem, for example, suggest an alternative ethic and course of action to move from the hierarchy of English heritage to a more flexible mechanism of influence. By glossing courtly romance and pastoral play with a veneer of georgic, Spenser celebrates the collective work of many people building

⁹⁴ Robert Matz sees Spenser’s melding of aristocratic themes and Protestant-humanist values in *The Faerie Queene* as a strategy to make his poetry both aesthetically enjoyable and morally profitable, to secure a place of honor through his labor, and to appeal to a middle-class readership. However, romance is a problematic part of the formula: “But the chivalric quest also opposes the restraint and discipline it represents because its endlessness paradoxically suggests not only continual productive activity but also an activity with no end, and hence one that is non-instrumental, a form of play” (112).

a nation through a grand project of productivity, and he also takes a middle course between the extremes of an elite oligarchy and the radical Diggers to come. He accommodates the new emerging economy and reserves a dignified role for those men who have been stymied in social advancement and yet want a say in England's future and a place in its memory. The poet who emerges from the forest of romance and finds the pastoral dream equally unfruitful looks to georgic as a source of social and poetic inspiration.

Georgic tempers the exclusively aristocratic vision of pastoral and romance in Book 6 by foregrounding the orchestrating figure of the poet-plowman and addressing the interests of a middle-class audience increasingly participating in an economy of production and improvement. Fitter traces "persistent class-correlations" in naturalistic art forms that detail labor, such as calendar art and georgic poetry, and the abstract, idealized genres that celebrate the power generated by labor yet ignore work itself, such as landscape painting and pastoral (*Poetry, Space, Landscape* 204-205). Spenser's georgic impulses in Book 6 may answer the question, after the failure of chivalry as a viable model for social progress, of "Where do we go from here?"

Instances of georgic appear throughout *The Faerie Queene*, beginning in Book 1 with the revelatory moment of Red Cross's nativity in a field, his upbringing "in ploughmans state to byde" (10.66.5), and his spiritual destiny as St. George. In Book 6, the proem praises courtesy as a virtue planted by the gods "And by them long with carefull labour nurst, / Till it to ripeness grew, and forth to honour burst" (3.8-9). Such praise melds with the condemnation of the Salvage Nation (which steals rather than works for sustenance) in a conception of agriculture as a necessary practice for societal

wellbeing and ideally embraced by all beings, from the gods to the forest-dwelling rout. Most significantly, Spenser becomes Low's "poet of work" through a personal endorsement of the spirit of honorable and redeeming labor in his self-representation as a poet-plowman, his adoption of the farmer as part of his own self-image.

Halfway through *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's narrative voice transitions from a maritime metaphor of the poet at sea to a georgic metaphor of the poet at the plow, beginning with an image of his plowing team in Book 4 and extending into Book 5 with a mention of furrows and yokes.⁹⁵ Book 6 witnesses a full explication of this georgic self-representation, notably at the beginning of canto 9, Low notes (36-37), as Calidore pursues the Blatant Beast from the forest of romance into a pastoral world that is equally inadequate for the proper reformation of social relations (43). Spenser inserts the humble voice of the supplicant poet into the narrative as an alternative to these social models and generic modes at just the moment that Calidore will enter a community of shepherds, revealing that the pastoral cantos of Book 6 are themselves the product of an overarching georgic gesture:

Now turne againe my teme thou jolly swayne,
 Backe to the furrow which I lately left;
 I lately left a furrow, one or twayne
 Vnplough'd, the which my coulter hath not cleft:
 Yet seem'd the soyle both fayre and frutefull eft,

⁹⁵ Jason Lawrence interprets Spenser's use of the ship-at-sea conceit as he adapts it from Tasso and Ariosto to signify Spenser's withdrawal from public writing to personal poetic fulfillment (274). But the georgic elements in the final half of *The Faerie Queene* suggest a continued engagement in society through poetry that encourages productive activity rather than contemplative withdrawal from Elizabethan society. See also Patrick Cheney's alternative theory of Spenser's literary career.

As I it past, that were too great a shame,
 That so rich frute should be from vs bereft;
 Besides the great dishonour and defame,

Which should befall to *Calidores* immortall name. (6.9.1)

This transitional stanza crystallizes the dilemma faced by Spenser the poet and Spenser, esquire: the threat of loss, the decline of nobility, and the poet's power in reclaiming and reshaping the past. The stanza claims poetry as a productive discourse in the cultivation of society, and this part of the tale is productive *only* because the poet cultivates it. It emphasizes the linearity and productivity of georgic in contrast to the disorientated wandering and endlessness of romance, and Calidore's story still presents fertile literary material, but only in the power of the poet-plowman (in this case a poet of the middling sort). The knight is impotent, unable to save himself or his name, and reliant on the work of the poet and the swain to prevent his everlasting shame.

Calidore himself is not to blame so much as the model of chivalric honor by which he is constrained. The last two lines turn the sense of humility which often infuses labor—of both the laborer and professional poet—outward to Calidore. The speaker invokes the social stigma of labor in the “dishonor and defame, / Which should befall to *Calidores* immortall name” if the speaker does not continue the tale *or*, implicitly, if Calidore were to handle a plow himself in an attempt to redeem his name, the only course of action possible in a georgic metaphor that removes poetry from the aristocratic realm of activities. The knight's chivalric model of honor dooms him to dependency in a new age that requires productive action and has opened a field of honorable and profitable labor allowable to the poet and the swain but not available to the knight. In employing

“chivalric language [in] a context of realistic georgic,” Spenser does not so much raise the stature of the plowman (Low 37) as smirk at the inability of the knight to help himself. If Calidore seems to abandon or devalue the quest given him by the Faery Queen, the work of redefining courtesy and suggesting a new social agenda is picked up by the poem itself, employing the georgic in a larger project that elevates the poet and rejects the chivalric social forms and pastoral delusions that rigidly restrict participation in England’s future.⁹⁶

Appropriately for a book mourning the loss of nobility in the forest, the georgic genre itself harbors an admission of failure and loss, of descent and decay from an original ideal. Georgic is made possible only through loss—for Spenser’s classical models, loss of the Golden Age, and for Spenser himself of the chivalric past. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* imagines a former Golden Age when people lived in ease and contentment off land “untoucht of spade or plough” that freely yielded nuts and fruits (1.115-21). Hints of a similar natural perfection appear in *The Faerie Queene*, as in the “continuall Spring” (3.6.42.1) of Book 3’s Garden of Adonis, where the boughs of the myrtles “sharp steele did neuer lop, / Nor wicked beastes their tender buds did crop” (3.6.43.4-5) and where “There was a pleasaunt Arber, not by art, / But of the trees owne inclination made” (3.6.44.2-3). In the proem to Book 5, Spenser mourns this Golden Age, untouched by war and deceit and where “all things freely grew out of the ground”

⁹⁶ Jane Tylus notes that Spenser’s “poetry represents a fascinating attempt to validate the poet as an autonomous entity and to come to terms with the place and value of imaginary labor in early modern society” (72). She argues that the poet-plowman stance Spenser adopts from Virgil invokes the poet’s precarious state in a system of production dependent on patronage (57-58). Spenser’s career struggles between “the myth of Virgilian georgic or the myth of poetic self-sufficiency” are highlighted in Calidore’s shattering of these myths on Mount Acidale (Tylus 72), yet, in the context of my argument involving cantos 1-8 about the failure of nobility to sustain itself, Spenser seems already to recognize changing social and economic conditions that may aid his poetic autonomy.

(5.Pr.9.7). But while georgic is predicated on loss, as is romance, like romance it is a genre of action with an implied nemesis against which it strives: wildness.

For early golden times are from another perspective wild times, and georgic offers a vision of progress, through cultivation, from the rudeness of creation. Evander's description in the *Aeneid* of the people Saturn rehabilitated depicts farming as civilized advancement for a tribe of primitive and ignorant people, born of trees, who lived by hunting and gathering (Virgil 8.319-25). In *The Faerie Queene*, agriculture as a marker of civilization appears in the story of the Salvage Nation, which captures and nearly devours Serena in canto 8 of Book 6. These people of the forest live by robbery and "ne did giue / Them selues to any trade, as for to driue / The painefull plough, or cattell for to breed" (6.8.35.4-6).⁹⁷ An urgent need for *cultus* underlies both Virgil's passage and Spenser's story of the Salvage Nation. For labor and agricultural cultivation also enable the *cultus* of learning, education, and culture—including poetry and the agricultural reform campaigns, based on empirical inquiry, of the next century. Spenser's georgic argues for *cultus* in both senses, a drive that precludes a return to the forest of yore yet suggests a reincorporation of landscape in a national epic story exemplified by Spenser's work.

The move away from the romance forest at the end of Book 6 and the book's georgic coloring would seem to dismiss the forest as a literary trope and social landscape, a surrendering of it to the failed squires or the Salvage Nation. Yet Spenser and georgic in general do not necessarily abandon the wood. Classical and Christian mandates to make fruitful the land, "man's pristine appointed stewardship over non-sacred creation" (Fitter 182), encourages a conversion of wild spaces to civic uses, including the

⁹⁷ Stillman notes the class colorings of the episode: "Pastoral is fine for the idealistically conceived Pastorella, but the savages are measured by the civilizing yardstick of the georgic" (308).

management of forests. Book 2 of Virgil's *Georgics* celebrates of the fruits of the forest and teaches how to cultivate trees and vines, moving from praise of nature's agency to the practice of human agency, from the mysteries of natural workings to the management of those workings.

The catalogue of trees in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* (1.1.8-9) demonstrates the conversion of wildness to worthwhile use while nodding at a literary tradition that includes Virgil's *Georgics* (2.440-53) and *Aeneid* (6.179-82) and Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules* (l. 176-82). As Una and Red Cross enter what they will discover to be the Wandering Wood of spiritual and moral error, they mark the beauty and variety of trees around them. The catalogue becomes an index of the cultural associations some trees hold (e.g., laurel with poets and generals, the willow with rejected love) and the products that come from them (e.g., birch arrows, oak building timber). The catalogue, often interpreted as symbolic of Red Cross and Una's arrogance and as reflecting "man's confident moral dissection of his universe" (D. Cheney 24), has a thrust that is almost uniformly literary and material, however.⁹⁸ These lines portray the societal value of the wild if man manages and cultivates the forest.⁹⁹ The tree catalogue of Book 1 is a product of Spenser's georgic insights into his epic mission, "a process of turning chaotic energy into land and *land* into the poetic-utilitarian *landscape*," exemplifying a militaristic civilizing ethos (Herron 99-100, emphasis in the original). The passage links the poet with the conqueror and the poetic language of georgic with the imagery of weaponry and

⁹⁸ Only the last line about the "Maple seldom inward sound" (1.1.9.9) bears moral or allegorical implications.

⁹⁹ Herron sees this impulse in the context of Spenser's relationship with Ireland, arguing that "his labor provided the foundation for an imperial ideology, a 'georgic spirit,' which sought to build an anglicized, hierarchical Protestant society out of the so-called 'wasteland' of a chronically rebellious nation" (99 n. 4). Pauline Henley surmises that the wood as described in Book 1 was inspired by the Wood of Glenageenty in southwest Ireland (128).

war. The tree catalogue reveals the political and poetic potential of the forest and is reminiscent of early modern concerns both about rebellion in the woods and about the ability of English forests to supply a rapidly growing navy. But by Book 6, swords have been melted into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.

So the georgic overtones of *The Faerie Queene* participate in a revision of the forest, a redirection of the energies of men toward productive activity. If georgic narratives are predicated on loss and the first eight cantos of Book 6 depict a loss of nobility, georgic offers a response, a path of action.¹⁰⁰ Although it is not unique in its progressive ethic, georgic offers a partial recovery of better times, of the silver age, if not the golden, and it fills a void left by the fading of the aristocratic model of social influence.¹⁰¹ It affirms the productive activities of the middling sort—the merchants, the estate planters, the civil servants, the poets—who may admire the values of the aristocracy but, by Spenser’s time, have recognized the limits of its feudalistic social system and the literary forms it emulates.

But by no means is Spenser a Grantorto or a leveler, for his goal was not to condemn the social hierarchy but to gain entrance to it (Schoenfeldt 155). He strove to shed his liminal position in Elizabethan society through a self-fashioned role as the nation’s poet laureate, and his estate in Kilcolman, County Cork, and its demise in

¹⁰⁰ Heather Dubrow discusses the implications of the trope of thievery in the later cantos of Book 6, noting that pastoral and romance both engage with loss similarly. Pastoral is repetitive, patterned on a loop of loss and recovery and structured around shared engagement in a poem’s or a song’s performance, which means that thieves such as the Brigands threaten more than material possessions because they disrupt the pattern of recovery itself (213). She refines the nucleus of romance from a form intent on “finding what was lost” to “*returning what was lost*,” an impulse antithetical to the thief, and “*protecting what is threatened*” (213, emphases in the original), which not even Calidore can do. The Brigands succeed in destroying the pastoral retreat at the end of Book 6, sending one survivor, Pastorella, back to court and the other, Coridon, to drift away heartbroken with Meliboe’s remaining flocks. In this sense, pastoral fails just as romance does.

¹⁰¹ Greg Garrard reminds, “Pastoral [...] need not always be nostalgic, but may be utopian and proleptic” (37).

rebellion's flames, indicate the status for which he strived and his limited success in climbing the social ladder.¹⁰² Yet I am not convinced he felt confident in 1596 about validating England's social hierarchy, or more specifically, the aristocracy's and the court's proclaimed monopoly on the political direction of England. His weakened confidence in the aristocratic myths rooted in chivalric romance emerges in the first two thirds of Book 6, in which the forest representatives who embody an aristocratic ideal fade away, frozen in an adolescent stasis of development and never to become England's next knights. Spenser's self-identification with the plowman, as well, and the values of a georgic ethic validate Englishmen without rank and favor an ethic of productivity that more warmly embraces the middle classes. Tonkin believes that for Spenser, writing is "a sacred act with direct social implications" (*Spenser's Courteous Pastoral* 209), and that the "process of redefinition is the crucial mechanism of the book" (*The Faerie Queene* 174). McRae notes that by the mid-seventeenth century, "'georgic economics' consistently bound the expansive aims of the individual to a celebratory vision of national development" (200). Book 6 bids farewell to the model of chivalric romance, dismissing the forest of romance as the birthplace of England's leading men and suggesting a georgic ethic embodied in the labor of lesser men, including men like Spenser himself, who have not been embraced by the existing social hierarchy. The forest of the farmer suggests the small landowner's pride of Standish's manual more than the privilege of Manwood's treatise, and it subtly diminishes land-based aristocratic power. In Book 6, the squires melt into the woods, Tristram in a dead knight's armor; a piping poet-plowman emerges to foretell of new English forests to come.

¹⁰² Spenser's Irish estate comprised 3,028 acres of confiscated land cultivated by six English settlers (Wall 356).

Chapter Four: A Table in the Wilderness: The Great Hall Grove of Milton's

*Paradise Regained**From Wild Woods to Country Estates: The Forested Legacy of Book 2*

We might think of John Milton's *Paradise Regained* (1671) as a younger son, suffering in the shadow of the poet's earlier, celebrated epic and from an identity crisis of sorts. The question of the most accurate generic label for *Paradise Regained* has been a critical concern. What kind of poem is it? Barbara Lewalski's *Milton's Brief Epic* thoroughly traces its theological and generic roots, and she notes that it blends other genres, including dialogue, pastoral, romance, and hymn, into an "epic frame" (Lewalski, *Life* 513). Anthony Low agrees that the poem morphs through a number of genres (325) and adds georgic to the list.¹⁰³ I would like to examine the imprint of a hitherto unmentioned generic influence on *Paradise Regained*, the seventeenth-century country house poem, and the ways in which that poetry's malleability, represented by a great-hall grove, serves Milton's reformist political and spiritual ends.¹⁰⁴ In his lord of the wood Milton redefines lordship in social, poetic, and spiritual contexts.

Critical examination of English country house poetry (or country house "discourse" in a broader sense of architecture, estate politics, and manorial culture) has

¹⁰³ For example, in addition to Lewalski's study, Louis Martz argues that the poem, if not patterned after Virgil's *Georgics*, is deeply imprinted with Virgil's structure and a georgic style and tone. Low settles on a judgment of "heroic georgic" mode (327).

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Wortham glances at the influence of country house poetry on *Paradise Lost* by linking concepts of *locus amoenus*, hospitality, and elegy to Adam and Eve's bower. Wortham contextualizes Milton's use of the country house poem as a way to deal with the defeat of republicanism in England; he writes "the conventions and expectations of the country house poem provide a wonderfully appropriate set of ideas for helping to explain how paradise was lost once in Eden and how its original loss has been re-echoed in the lost paradise of England" (150).

been primarily limited to a small coterie of poems determined to fall within the genre.¹⁰⁵ But how have the recognizable motifs and values of the country house poem been influential in, adopted by, or adapted to seventeenth-century poetry lying outside the narrow confines of the genre proper? What do country house poems suggest about legitimacy, authority, and their social markers in the later seventeenth century? How do they shed light on the complex intersection of Milton's religious, political, and poetic convictions and how he understood his role as a poet? In reading a poet such as Milton, of whom "the deliberateness and sophistication of [his] generic strategy" (Wortham 141) is a critical commonplace, tracing the implications of the country house poem—a form grappling with changing seventeenth-century social dynamics—in *Paradise Regained* stresses the degree to which Milton's sociopolitical world is implicated in his spiritual vision.

Country house poetry also helps locate the generic indeterminacy of *Paradise Regained* in the changeable nature of the genres from which it is constructed. The country house poem itself, while always concerned with "ceremonies of hospitality and hierarchical obligation" (Fowler 14), evolves over the course of the seventeenth century from a genre of feudal fantasy to one of retirement from the republic. The poet's

¹⁰⁵ G. R. Hibbard (1956), credited with recognizing the genre, numbers these poems at six: Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" and "To Sir Robert Worth," Thomas Carew's "To Saxham" and "To My Friend G. N. from Wrest," Richard Herrick's "A Panegyric to Sir Lewis Pemberton," and Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House*. Since Hibbard defined the genre, the field has widened to include such poems as Aemilia Lanyer's "The Description of Cooke-ham," and scholars have argued for a more inclusive consideration of verse, as Pamela Hammons does in placing Katherine Austen's short "On the Situation of Highbury" within the generic tradition. Alastair Fowler's *The Country House Poem: A Cabinet of Seventeenth-Century Estate Poems and Related Items* (1994) adopts the term estate poem because the content and scope of many poems extend well beyond the houses themselves, and his expanded critical purview includes more than 70 poems that span various generic labels. Fowler formulates 10 subgenres of the estate poem: invitations, welcomes, entertainment poems, appreciations or visit poems, retirement poems, park poems, closet poems, building poems, hunting poems, and satiric versions of the estate poem. Critics have also thoroughly traced the classical origins of the genre in Horace, Juvenal, and Martial.

relationship with his noble patron changes, as does the genre's view of the lord in the world. The question is not about which generic label best fits the poem, but how Milton employs and manipulates the conventions of the genre toward his own poetic and political ends. Traces of the country house poem in the banquet temptation in Book 2 of *Paradise Regained* demonstrate a clear generic strategy that operates through social criticism and poetic parody to condemn aristocratic authority.

Recognizing the country house construct challenges a critical assessment that has tended to divorce the poem from political and social engagement (Knoppers 35), an assessment recent scholarship has aimed to correct. For example, Laura Lunger Knoppers sees *Paradise Regained* as negating royalist depictions of a holy Charles I and as reclaiming a rhetoric of martyrdom for Puritan and Independent causes. Kari Boyd McBride examines the socially differentiating power of a country house discourse that proved to be “the most effective language available for discussing issues at the intersection of legitimacy and land” (34). Lewalski sees “bold commentary on fraught contemporary issues” in each temptation (*Life* 515). Milton's use of country house discourse in his biblical epic engages with questions of authority, legitimacy, and power as fought over in the tumult of seventeenth-century English social life and politics.

In a religious context, the laudatory nature of country house poetry makes it amenable to incorporation into the larger purpose of worship and praise inherent in *Paradise Regained*.¹⁰⁶ As Aemilia Lanyer, Ben Jonson, and Andrew Marvell admire their

¹⁰⁶ Country house poems often incorporate a Christian ethic that admires humility, charity, and devout faith. For example, Aemilia Lanyer's “The Description of Cooke-ham” foregrounds her patroness Margaret Clifford's saintly devotion and patient suffering in praise of “the divine plan of God” (McBride 120). Richard Herrick's “A Panegyric to Sir Lewis Pemberton” praises a man “who can / Teach man to keep a God in man” (133-34), and Thomas Carew's “To Saxham” employs Christian imagery of sacrifice,

lords and ladies, Milton praises his Lord. The country house poem appears particularly attractive for use in a greater program of praise, but its surface politics (the genre's reputation as a booster of the status quo of aristocratic culture) clash with the recent historical realities of Milton's England and his own convictions. Yet the genre is also deeply ambivalent about the question of social rank and deeply invested in the question of poetic power, making it subtly useful in Milton's redefinition of "true" lordship and his simultaneous criticism of the powerful elite of English society who attempt in their royalism to dictate *by whom* and *how* "true" worship occurs.

Markers of the country house poem emerge in the second book of *Paradise Regained*, where Milton chooses an English country house construct to dramatize a biblical episode. The banquet scene clearly invokes the country house poem tradition; elaborately described food, a courtly and generous host, a lowly guest, and implications of duty, obligation, and social harmony mark this episode as an example of Milton's adept manipulation of genre. A hungry Son of God, pondering the revelation of his divinity, roams the wilderness and, at night, dreams of food. In the morning, he wanders into a grove of trees and encounters a smartly dressed Satan, who presents him with a lavish feast and invites him to eat. Amidst what has been called the poem's "spare style, austere setting, and paucity of action," which many readers find "baffling and cold" (Knoppers 35), the banquet episode awakens the senses with a rich, bright, stimulating, and—to readers familiar with country house conventions—recognizable scene. Sources

pilgrimage, an ark, and the Old Testament flood (McClung 144). William McClung characterizes Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House* as celebratory of Thomas Fairfax's religious and spiritual pursuits rather than his civic and military service (160-61).

for the banquet scene in Book II of *Paradise Regained* have not been identified.¹⁰⁷

Lewalski calls the scene “a diabolic parody of the heavenly manna and the temperate repasts offered to Elijah” (*Milton’s Brief Epic* 216). But it is just as likely a parody of country house discourse that in Milton’s historical context enables him to draw in vivid terms patent distinctions between legitimate higher authority and mere earthly authority. A specific structure signals the presence of a nonbiblical, very English intertextual intervention: a great hall grove.

The great hall grove looms overhead as the other prominent feature of the country house poem, in addition to the feast, present in the banquet scene of *Paradise Regained*. The feast takes place in a great hall of sorts, a grove of trees that Milton describes in direct opposition to a shepherd’s cottage (2.287-88) as a grand architectural space: “High rooft, and walks beneath, and alleys brown, / That opened in the midst a woody scene” (2.293-94). It is in this space, a grand hall of shade and birdsong manipulated for the guest’s entertainment and the host’s glory, that Satan, in his invitation to the Son (and readers) to swallow his deception, raises the question of lordship and attempts to secure his own.

This chapter is concerned with Milton’s redefinition of lordship, especially as complicated by a major adaptation Milton makes in his application of the country house poem: the *displacement* of its banquet from the English great hall to the biblical

¹⁰⁷ In *Milton’s Brief Epic*, Lewalski finds little connection between this scene and any of the Christiads Milton may have consulted (119). She discusses various Old Testament stories in which the Israelites are lured to sin by Balaam and the Moabites through the temptation of a feast (198-202), and she notes their cry in the wilderness, echoed by Milton: “‘Yea, they spake against God: they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?’” (Psalms 78:19, qtd. by Lewalski 197).

wilderness, and specifically to a forest. Book 2 is the woodiest book of the poem.¹⁰⁸

The Son wanders a sparsely described wilderness that shifts from vaguely rocky places to woody spaces, where “wild Beasts came forth the woods to roam” (1.502), reminiscent of the deep forests of romance narratives or of Milton’s masque *Comus*. But the banquet scene specifically occurs in a “pleasant Grove” (2.289), a “woody Scene” (2.294) that is also strangely constructed and described in architectural terms. Trees, groves, and parks are common elements of the country house or estate poem and often naturalize an idealized social hierarchy and order, and their combination here with the element of the feast deepens issues of legitimacy, authority, and social status traditionally connected to land ownership in England.

In tempting the Son in a pleasant grove, or what Milton calls in *Paradise Lost* “a woody Theatre / Of stateliest view” (4.141-42), Satan draws upon common connotations of the forest. The space appears to the Son as “Nature’s own work” (*Paradise Regained* 2.295) yet “to a superstitious eye, the haunt / Of wood-gods and wood-nymphs” (2.296-97), alluding to the otherworldly allure of the wood and suggesting the spirits that commonly bless county estates (McClung 143), such as Milton’s own Genius of the Wood in *Arcades*. Milton also connects the wood to romance in describing the servants as more beautiful than “faery damsels met in forest wide / By knights of Logres, or of Lyones, / Lancelot, or Palleas, or Pellenore” (2.359-61). Yet the structure of the grove as Milton describes it invokes not the pathless immensity of the romance forest or “the blind mazes of this tangl’d Wood” (181), the “leavy Labyrinth” (277) in *Comus*. Instead, it

¹⁰⁸ Of 19 occurrences of the words *forest*, *grove*, *groves*, *tree*, *trees*, *wood*, *woods* and *woody*, nearly half (nine) appear in Book 2 (Bradshaw). Fowler notes of estate poems that retirement, park, and hunting subgenres often feature a grove (14-16).

features a space similar to the wood entered by the poet in Marvell's *Upon Appleton House* (ca. 1651, pub. 1681) where "The arching boughs unite between / The columns of the temple green" (Marvell 509-10). Milton suggests similar outlines of a great hall in the banquet scene in *Paradise Regained*, yet his poem asks: Whose table, whose temple?

And so a malleable country house discourse becomes useful to Milton (and within the text, Satan) in the banquet scene. The prescribed social hierarchy and the ameliorating valence of a *sponte sua* Nature in country house poetry provide a cover by which Satan attempts to lure the Son to submission under the pretense of accepted social graces. Satan's temptation of the Son, in this particular form and in the particular setting of the great-hall-grove, is intricately tied to the issues of legitimacy and authority that absorbed English society and politics in the later seventeenth century, and country house discourse in service of Satan challenges the values upon which the social structure and its cultural expression are predicated. Inherent in these values is an unsupported façade, seen most strikingly in the concept of the great-hall grove where Satan's banquet is laid. In raising a country house great hall in God's wilderness, Milton depicts the artifice of English social status as opposed to a "natural" order depicted in country house poetry. His great-hall grove is not a condemnation of social hierarchy necessarily, but an admission of the historical and political nature of social relations in contrast to the timeless, ahistorical, and divine nature of creation *ex Deo*. There, in God's grove and Satan's great hall, Milton's hero and anti-hero debate the nature of a true authority that transcends the plane of human affairs.

The space and occasion of country house hospitality in *Paradise Regained* is carefully constructed at two levels, by the poet and by his antagonist Satan. Its social

context emerges in Book 1, where the first temptation Satan presents is social, rather than personal. The Son wanders the wilderness alone pondering his role on earth and his status in heaven. So Satan's first appearance to him, disguised as "an aged man in Rural weeds" (1.314), is as a companion, a bringer of fellowship and community, and he seizes on the Son's desire to be with and to serve others. He appeals to the Son to feed the wilderness's hungry, inviting the Son to be a beneficent host for the benefit of humankind. Recognizing the figure's true identity, the Son declines, replying, "Think'st thou such force in Bread? is it not written / [...] Man lives not by Bread only, but each Word / Proceeding from the mouth of God[?]" (1.347-50). He sees the arrogance of appropriating God the Father's providence, and he rejects the power of bread, social custom, and hosting as a role.

Having failed in his first attempt, Satan employs a more complicated trap in Book 2. Forty days into his sojourn, the Son notes with surprise that he, "Wand'ring this woody maze, and human food / Nor tasted, nor had appetite" (2.246-47), is suddenly hungry. He contents himself, "fed with better thoughts that feed / Mee hung'ring more to do my Father's will" (258-59). Night falls, and the Son "then laid him down / Under the hospitable covert nigh / Of Trees thick interwoven" (261-62) and sleeps. The dreams that follow seem at first glance to feed his doubts and perplexities, resisting his resolve to accept God's will. He dreams "as appetite is wont to dream, / Of meats and drinks, Nature's refreshment sweet" (264-65). Nature, which the Son first associates with bodily need and opposes to spiritual need, fuses here with heaven's will and directive. The source of hospitality is holy, as is the company the Son keeps. He dreams of eating heaven's catered repast with Elijah and of sharing Daniel's rejection of

Nebuchadnezzar's meat for a simple meal with a humble servant of God. The characteristics of these dreamed meals will clash with the feast the Son is offered upon waking. And like the ambiguity of Nature in this episode, as both divine and worldly, the great-hall grove has aspects of the protective, numinous "Trees thick interwoven" that shelter the Son's sleep, yet it also rings hollow.

Like the wilderness, the banquet proper presents the Son with a hermeneutical maze that he must navigate in his journey of self-understanding. Awake and still hungry, the Son sees from the top of a hill a "pleasant Grove" (289) and enters, drawn by birdsong and the shade. Milton's description of the grove is riddled with warnings:

High rooft, and walks beneath, and alleys brown
 That open'd in the midst a woody Scene;
 Nature's own work it seem'd (Nature taught Art)
 And to a Superstitious eye the haunt
 Of Wood Gods and Wood Nymphs; he view'd it round[.] (293-97)

Lewalski notes that the Son enters the grove in serene confidence that "the earth *is* the Lords [sic] and the freedom thereof" (*Milton's Brief Epic* 217, emphasis in the original). Readers, however, are put on guard: this grove only "seems" to be nature's work, its artifice hinted at by the theatrical word *scene* and the unholy potential lurking in its shade.

Clues immediately following the Son's entrance to the space give a better idea of the intertextual links readers may see in the poem and how Satan wants the Son to see his surroundings. For it is at this moment that Satan suddenly appears dressed "Not rustic as before, but seemlier clad, / As one in City, or Court, or Palace bred" (299-300). The

banquet he conjures compliments his regal self-presentation. The rich allure of the feast is reflected in Louis Martz's characterization of the banquet scene as Satan's "masque of temptation" and as "a rich Spenserian medley of myth and assonance" (14). A hint of the forest of sin infuses the great hall grove of sensuous temptation, evoking forests of poetry past, most prominently the ominous woods of Milton's *Comus* and the Wood of Error and the Bower of Bliss in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Satan's tempting of the Son in the banquet scene recalls Comus's attempted seduction of the Lady by an invitation to imbibe at his woodland palace. The Son's trusting stroll into a grove echoing with birdsong eerily echoes Redcross and Una's fateful entry into the Wood of Error, and the culinary and sexual delights offered by the grove of *Paradise Regained* are reminiscent of similar lures leading to the central snare of sinful abandon at the heart of the Bower of Bliss. The Son, like Redcross and Guyon, must read the allegorical clues of the forest to understand the spiritual significance of actions taken within the space.

The scene is potentially bewildering and overwhelming. The episode is dominated by imagery of food reminiscent of Jonson's "To Penshurst," Richard Herrick's "A Panegyric to Sir Lewis Pemberton," and Thomas Carew's "To Saxham," in which "prayers have made [the] table blest / With plenty, far above the rest" (13-14). The spread is a feast for the senses: enticing sights and smells, music in the air, and alluring beauties of each sex at hand. The banquet consists of "meats of noblest sort / And savour" (Milton 2.341-42), roasted, boiled, or wrapped in pastry; fish and shellfish of all types; and wine. The rich description needs little elaboration; Milton contrasts the spread to "that crude Apple that diverted Eve" (2.349) and ends his survey of the scene with the simple

statement, “Such was the splendour” (2.366).

The splendor of the feast *and* the grove in which it is served distinguish the space from the barren wilderness around it. N. H. Keeble notes that the poem’s setting is variously described as a “desert wild,” “pathless desert,” and “woody maze,” all clearly related to the forest, yet he sees the Son as “removed from the realm of the human” (Keeble 88). The space in which Satan tempts the Son’s senses certainly demarcates the grove from the rest of what is rather vaguely called “wilderness” in the poem and rather vaguely dealt with by critics. The grove, however, invokes recognizable social and poetic conventions that are keenly useful for Satan’s new assault upon the Son. Satan’s advantage is his “direct observation of human motives and human weakness,” about which the Son is relatively naïve (Lewalski, *Life* 514). This worldly space most resembles the medieval great hall so prominent in many country house poems.¹⁰⁹ A high-ceilinged, open-roomed, timber structure, often with dirt or rush floors in its earliest incarnation, the great hall matches Milton’s description and more importantly houses the functions of hospitality which Satan enacts in the banquet scene. As a social space, it adds the complexity of hierarchies and understood practices to the labyrinth the Son must negotiate. For in addition to the allegorical resonances of the Christian spiritual wilderness, the Son’s situation is complicated by a secular and markedly English social context. He has entered not just a grove, but a great-hall grove inhabited by an aristocratic lord enacting specific conventions of hospitality.

If Spenser’s forest of romance in Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene* reveals the fading

¹⁰⁹ Lewalski suggests the wood resembles a grove of idolatry or a Catholic cathedral and that the banquet suggests a Catholic mass (*Milton’s Brief Epic* 217). Alternatively, she notes that the banquet scene “evokes extravagant banquets at the Stuart courts” (Lewalski, *Life* 516).

of a forest-strengthened feudal nobility, Milton's *Paradise Regained* again places the lord in the wood and suggests not so much the decline of aristocracy, but the dangers posed to Christian ideals by the lord in the wood and the values he represents. The Son's challenge involves more than spying evil in disguise; drawing as it does upon country house poetics, it requires social intelligence and implicates English social life. The genre of the country house poem, its evolution over the course of the seventeenth century, and its use of forest and tree imagery are necessary glosses to understanding the great-hall grove of *Paradise Regained* and the banquet scene's role in the struggle over status that occurs there as Milton redefines lordship.¹¹⁰

Country House Woodlands

This section examines forests and trees in four country house poems: Jonson's "To Penshurst," Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham," and Marvell's "Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borow: To the Lord Fairfax" and *Upon Appleton House*. Motifs of feasts and forests link the country house genre to *Paradise Regained*, but central to understanding how Milton employs it is the genre's ambiguity and ambivalence about social rank. The following discussion gives special attention to the representation of poets and noble patrons and the relationship between them, ambivalence about social hierarchies, and the evolution of the genre over the course of the seventeenth century as it develops from poetry celebrating the lord of the people to poetry celebrating the lord of retirement. These aspects of the country house genre reveal impulses undermining the

¹¹⁰ Heather Dubrow argues that early modern poetry "tropes" geographical space to indicate social place and that spaces like the forest are "amorphous locales [that are] the geographical equivalent of deferred closure" ("Masquing of Genre" 66).

validity of rank as a marker of legitimate power *and* a sense of the lowly poet as endowed with special potential through his or her powers of expression. And, most remarkably, trees and forests figure prominently in these moments of doubt and shifts of power.

Estate trees—in groves, orchards, hedges, and hunting parks—appear in most country house poems, including Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” published in *The Forrest* in his 1616 *Works*. This poem demonstrates how trees in country house poetry are often complicit in three social projects of the nobility: representing a Nature that legitimizes the social hierarchy, building social status among peers and subordinates, and establishing (sometimes illusionary) long-term legitimacy.

After a mere six lines praising the house itself for what it is not (“built to envious show”), Jonson divides his attention in “To Penshurst” between surveys of its grounds and its social bustle. A classically ordained *sponte sua* motif appears early, smiling upon the estate’s owner, in the poem’s first description of Penshurst Place’s landscape, “Where Pan and Bacchus their high feasts have made, / Beneath the broad beech and the chestnut shade” (11-12). The beech and the chestnut shelter the genii of the estate, lords in their element and outdoor counterparts of the generous hosts indoors. Addressing his patron, Jonson marvels that a copse of trees named after the Lady Barbara Gamage Sidney’s family “never fails to serve thee seasoned deer / When thou wouldst feast or exercise thy friends” (20-21). Like the animals it surrenders to the table, the park serves the lord in a productive and submissive gesture to his legitimate authority as noble landowner. That he entertains his friends in it is a reminder of the deer park’s role in creating Robert Sidney’s

contemporary status.¹¹¹ Finally, the trees featured in “To Penshurst” represent a long-standing family legacy (despite the relatively recent acquisition of the estate) and its continuity in the trees linked to Lady Sidney and her chaste production of the “children thy great lord may call his own” (91).¹¹² In their longevity and fruitfulness, the woods and standard trees around Penshurst Place signify the ancient nobility of the landowner, a legitimacy underscored by the lady’s good English oak and her sexual fidelity, and they participate in a self-sacrificial nature that, like the peasants in the poem, gladly supports the myth of a happy social harmony.¹¹³

Potential strains on that harmony, however, are present in “To Penshurst” in the voice of the poet. A central section of the poem gives first-person witness to the unrestrained generosity Jonson finds at a feast in the great hall at Penshurst, “Where comes no guest but is allowed to eat, / Without his fear, and of thy lord’s own meat” (61-62). The poet’s voice testifies to an open-handedness that deigns to dismiss with formalities of rank, yet in its praise of such generosity, Jonson acknowledges the existence of a hierarchy. More strikingly, the poetic voice insists upon itself, swelling above what one imagines is the buzz of a busy party, almost as if Jonson’s personal will and power as poet cannot be contained. If only subtly, in seemingly admiring statements such as “all is there, / As if thou then wert mine, or I reigned here” (73-74), Jonson

¹¹¹ The park at Penshurst Place held 400 deer. Sidney attempted to expand the park around 1611 against the advice of his estate manager and despite his already strained finances (McBride 67-68).

¹¹² One such tree is the “Lady’s Oak,” a tree under which a lady of the house was said to go into labor and which Fowler cites as an example of the family tree motif (3).

¹¹³ David Hall Radcliffe discusses the social implications of the *sylvae* or miscellany “genre” and argues that the very organization of Jonson’s *The Forrest* celebrates and supports a hierarchical social order. Additionally, Paul Cubeta notes how the landscape of “To Penshurst” is divided into “a series of horizontal planes” “suggestive of a natural order,” citing the poem’s phrases “The lower land” (l. 22), “the middle grounds” (24) and “the tops” where the grove sits (25-26) (Cubeta 19). He sees in the poem “a deep respect or genuine love for those higher up in the hierarchy” (19) and of “ascending levels of the great chain of being” (22).

suggests more than social mobility, but a role reversal that would give him full sway uninhibited by the duties of deference. His poem reveals pressures on an assumed hierarchy and ambivalence about the status quo even as it articulates an idealized social vision (Wayne).¹¹⁴

As a whole, country house poetry is ambivalent toward social rank, at times claiming that an estate's benevolence and a lord's natural generosity negate the need to observe rank at the great hall table, while at other times acknowledging the enforcement of codes of status and praising a delineated order.¹¹⁵ Both approaches aim to paint a picture of perfect social harmony, an arrangement happily accepted by all members who have a place (although some need not observe it) in a community of plenty. Carew's "To Saxham" so hyperbolically insists on the social harmony inspired (or imposed) by the country estate that crime becomes impossible. He assures his patron, "And as for thieves, thy bounty's such, / They cannot steal, thou giv'st so much" (57-58). Regardless of the degree to which individual poems acknowledge the social dynamics of the great hall, all country house poems participate in a nostalgic depiction of social ideals, a naturalizing of the social hierarchy, and a reciprocation for literary patronage. Giving is central to the

¹¹⁴ Martin Elsky argues that, in fact, Jonson's "poems of place," including "To Penshurst," resist aristocratic power from a position above the aristocracy, not below, by identifying with the king. He believes that Jonson presents a "neo-feudalism" that expresses the centralization of power initiated by the Tudors and heightened by James I in his self-representation as the ultimate feudal English landowner whose claims oppose aristocratic autonomy. Elsky sees in Jonson an "abhorrence of an aristocracy addicted to conspicuous display instead of civic and military action" (405).

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Herrick's "A Panegyric to Sir Lewis Pemberton": "But all who at thy table seated are, / Find equal freedom, equal fare" (59-60). Jonson's "To Penshurst" shares this sentiment (61-64). Carew's "To My Friend G. N. From Wrest," however, approves of an ordered seating arrangement:

Some of that rank spun of a finer thread
Are with the women, Steward, and Chaplain, fed
With daintier cates; others of better note,
Whom wealth, parts, office, or the herald's coat
Have severed from the common, free sit
At the Lord's table[.] (37-42)

genre's value system; the lord proffers patronage and an imagined feudal comfort, and the recipients respond with an acceptance that insures the depicted social harmony.

Jonson himself is keenly aware of disappointing realities, one of which is his role as recipient in "To Penshurst"; his relationship to the noble lord is mitigated over the table, and although he suggests that he takes rather than receives, the labels of rank at Penshurst—king, lord, poet-servant, peasant—are inescapable. Trees help establish the natural artifice of this hierarchy. Jonson is also aware of the façade of the country house life. James Turner characterizes the seventeenth century as a calamitous period for the countryside during which poor people outside "the magic circles of Windsor, Belvoir and Penshurst" suffered through poor harvests, social unrest, and a mid-century civil war (1). The ideas of the benevolent lord attentive to the wellbeing of his tenants and his estate providing for them "are deft reversals of the accepted truth. [...] The very essence of nobility is power over the life-work of others; *they* make *him* free" (Turner 147, emphasis in the original). Raymond Williams echoes, "The world of Penshurst or of Saxham can be seen as a moral economy only by conscious selection and emphasis" (31). Details Jonson and his patrons choose to conceal include their rather recent acquisition of the estate (it becomes a Sidney family possession as a gift from Edward VI) and its origins as a country home built by a merchant from London (Wayne 98).

In other poems—markedly those that do not celebrate food as Jonson's does—trees play even more prominent roles in the poem's praise of the patron *and* in the poet's own experience on the estate. Lanyer's and Marvell's poems privilege the wooded spaces on their respective estates, partly through a physical identification of trees with the poets themselves. In leaving the great hall for the grove, these poets seem to achieve a degree

of independence, if not transcendence.

The speaker in Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" (1611) ignores the great hall to roam the estate grounds alone. Her poem is an encomium to Countess of Cumberland Margaret Clifford and her daughter Lady Anne, but it is also a eulogy for the estate in the classical "farewell to place" tradition as she mourns her physical separation from the countess and an insurmountable social distance between them. The defining characteristic of the poem is that the landscape, especially the trees, mourn with her and provide the means by which she may approach her noble patroness. The woods near Cookham are infused with the nobility of their lady (40) and overjoyed by her presence (60, 66), representing in their height and stateliness the lasting nobility of the countess at Cookham even in her absence. Lanyer describes an oak dominating the landscape and its welcome of the countess: "Which seeming joyfull in receiuing thee, / Would like a Palme tree spread his armes abroad, / Desirous that you should there make abode" (60-62). The real shelter of the estate lies in its woodland.

The metaphoric alignment of the "stately Tree" (54) is ambiguous, however. In its personification as an adoring subject, the oak is much like the poet herself, already linked to the trees in mutual mourning and left behind without the beloved lady. Yet the oak comes to represent the countess herself when she grants the oak "a chaste, yet louing kisse" (166), infusing it in this embrace with her person and nobility. Jealous, the speaker kisses the tree to steal the countess's kiss for herself. She characterizes the act as necessary theft, and while the trees "with this most beauteous tree / Made their sad consort Sorrowes harmony" (177-78), Lanyer ends the poem defiantly with an image of an unbreakable physical connection between her and the countess: "So long as life

remains, / Tying my heart to her by those rich chaines” (209-10). The oak links the women and represents both, subverting rank through nature.

The woodland of Cookham serves as a medium for Lanyer’s emotional expression through pathetic fallacy and allows her to approximate physical contact with a socially distant patroness. In contrast to the topical details of architecture or social rituals common in poems such as Jonson’s, the natural elements of Lanyer’s invoke a timeless holiness that grants her access to a spiritual fellowship with Cumberland, if not a social one. It may also compensate for gender inequity by linking the women subjects to an authority on high. If Jonson’s attributes “moral estate management and legitimate lordship” to Sidney, McBride argues that “Lanyer’s Lady observes the ordered landscape and sees there the divine plan of God, which demonstrates her virtue and legitimate ladyship in a system of divine honors that, Lanyer insists repeatedly in her poem, supersedes the earthly hierarchy” (120).

The desire to transcend or to escape the harsh realities of society, politics, and earthly existence perhaps drove the evolution of the country house poem to what Fowler calls the “retirement poem.” Jonson claims to enjoy camaraderie with his lord and Lanyer yearns for camaraderie with her countess; in the later seventeenth century, Marvell finds his lord largely absent and the mythical façade of feudal hospitality largely debunked. By Jonson’s time, the customs of country hospitality were dying if not dead, giving way to new economic and social practices. The Sidney family had likely vacated the medieval great hall to eat meals in Penshurst’s private West Solar dining room above the great hall, only peering down at the goings on there through the squint window. For Jonson, the attractive myths of social order, community, hospitality, and harmony could be celebrated

in poetry, if not lived. But by the end of the century, country house poems present an all-together different type of lord. Instead of celebrating collegiality in his two country house poems, Marvell obligingly praises his patron's retirement from war and civic life, then retires into the woods himself.

Mary Ann McGuire traces an ideological shift in late-century country house poems that presents the country estate as a retreat of calm seclusion for the private enjoyment of aristocratic pleasures (reflected in the alternative label, "retirement poems"). She writes that Carew's "To Saxham" (1640) and Richard Lovelace's "Amyntor's Grove" (1649) show a development of the country house poem as it abandons the myth of a happy great hall community to instead bolster a "cavalier justification of the country house as a private stronghold, within which aristocratic comforts and powers can be preserved against the rising tide of opposition" (93-94). Lovelace's poem in particular celebrates the private nature of the lord's home and his accumulated wealth in the form of its art collection, not shared feasts.¹¹⁶ By the time Milton writes *Paradise Regained*, the tradition of pseudo-feudal hospitality as celebrated in early country house poems can no longer be feigned, and later poems like those of the Cavaliers and Marvell (a friend of Milton) reflect a new political and social atmosphere.

The woods at Thomas Fairfax's Bilbrough estate, five miles northwest of the more well-known Nun Appleton, become the means by which Marvell depicts his patron's character and praises his withdrawal from political life. In "Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borow: To the Lord Fairfax" (pub. 1681), the parliamentary general and the

¹¹⁶ Writes Chris Fitter, "The ubiquitous motif of plentitude delectably contracted into narrow bounds and privately owned is thus a structure of feeling much fed by the appetite for liquid capital and enclosing fields" and reflects "a bourgeois acquisitive individualist version of the medieval park of plenty" (*Poetry, Space, Landscape* 265).

manor house itself are absent; they are represented by a modest but notable hill and a waving “plume of aged trees” (34). Six of the poem’s ten stanzas deal with a pastoral stand of oaks that, in its peace and domestic tranquility, stands in opposition to civil war’s pikes and heaps of dead.

The grove represents a place of retirement for Fairfax that balances his prominent public achievements as indicated by the hill, yet as in Lanyer’s poem, the poetic ownership of the trees is not so clearly cut. The trees are identified as analogues to Fairfax himself, genii of his household, and the poetic voice. Their majestic growth mirrors the success of the landowner, and appropriating his authority, the trees serve as the protective spirits of the house:

For they (’tis credible) have sense
 As we, of love and reverence,
 And underneath the coarser rind
 The Genius of the house do bind.
 Hence they successes seem to know,
 And in their Lord’s advancement grow;
 But in no memory were seen,
 As under this, so straight and green[.] (49-56)

Their supernatural aura, though bound in bark, emerges again in their praise of Fairfax’s military achievements and in Marvell’s praise of them: “’Tis true, ye trees, nor ever spoke / More certain oracles in oak” (73-74). The characterization of the trees as genii invokes the Attentive Spirit in Milton’s *Comus* and the Genius of the Wood in his *Arcades*, and though they serve as metaphors by which the upward course of Fairfax’s

life achievement can be measured, their supernatural nature divorces them from a direct identification with the lord himself. They rise above earthly authority, communing with nature, and whispering their praise. Most importantly, they lend authority to Marvell's poetic voice. He speaks to them and through them to express a quiet praise that admires the humility of his lord, and he does so from a position above his social position, gaining a transcendent authority which no mere poet-tutor could claim alone.

The poet's voice strengthens in *Upon Appleton House*, in which the woods have a similar split personality, evocative of the lord's nobility yet infused by the poetic voice to the point of momentarily challenging the source of authority in the poem. Like Lanyer, Marvell imagines a bodily merger with the trees themselves in a celebratory spasm of praise for the natural elements of Nun Appleton. But before he enters the wood, he tells the history of the noble Fairfaxes in the story of their estate buildings. The first few lines of the poem indicate the poet's interest in native origins and structures:

Within this sober frame expect
 Work of no foreign Architect,
 That unto caves the quarries drew,
 And forests did to pastures hew[.] (1-4)

Despite his disparagement of foreign styles and the pejorative "architect," Marvell follows in his poetic pursuit the architect's course: withdrawal into nature for source material. He traces Isabel Thwaites's past in the former nunnery, her rape (as in *rapere*) by William Fairfax, their appropriation of the dissolved Church's authority in the structures of the estate, and Thomas Fairfax's retreat from politics and war. Authority passes from corrupt religion to nobility through the buildings. Yet the poet never enters

them, but instead moves through the fields and flees the flood of the Wharfe River to “Take sanctuary in the wood” (482).

There he continues the theme of noble family lineage and oscillates between images of nature in its unmolested state and nature as transformed by human hands. His wooded sanctuary recalls the ark of Noah, who would have found fit lumber here, Marvell notes, and other examples of godly intervention on earth, such as the marriage of Fairfax and Anne Vere:

The double wood of ancient stocks
 Linked in so thick an union locks,
 It like two Pedigrees appears,
 On one hand Fairfax, th’ other Veres[.] (489-92)

The genealogical trees of the two aristocratic families merge with each other and with the trees of Nun Appleton, and the combined strength of their union is marked by the surrounding imagery in these two stanzas of an ark, a carpenter, timber, stocks, a cradle, and a hearse. The natural and manufactured strains are intertwined much like the pedigrees: the ship is a “yet green, yet growing ark” (484), the personified timber is similarly pressed, living, from the forest, and the future progeny of the Fairfax stock will enter the world in nature’s cradle and leave it in her hearse. Embedded in the wordplay of natural and crafted wood, the legitimacy and legacy embodied in the family tree appears simultaneously naturalized and providentially engineered.

Yet Marvell’s overarching expression of natural constructedness comes in the following stanzas in the space of the estate’s still-standing forest, unhewed by any architect. While critics commonly examine Marvell’s description of Nun Appleton

against those houses he uses as foils, such as the Archbishop of York's Cawood Castle (McClung 158), they have neglected the forest space as an alternative to the house. Yet the wood is strangely structural. Before entering the wood, Marvell describes it as an impenetrable mass in stanza 63:

When first the eye this forest sees
 It seems indeed as Wood not Trees;
 As if their neighborhood so old
 To one great trunk them all did mold.
 There the huge bulk takes place, as meant
 To thrust up a Fifth Element;
 And stretches still so closely wedged
 As if the Night within were hedged. (497-504)

From the outside, the wood at Nun Appleton appears as a dense forest primeval, a mass of ancient generative material, seemingly dormant but forceful in its potential for creativity. The concept of chaos, linked to the forest (*hyle* and *sylva*), infuses the stanza in Marvell's emphasis on age, moldable material, mass, elements, and night.

But the forest only appears as a lump of unformed lumber from the outside; it is accessible to the poet, who, having penetrated its borders, molds it into an ordered space of natural architecture that foreshadows Milton's great-hall grove:

Dark all without it knits; within
 It opens passable and thin;
 And in as loose an order grows
 As the Corinthian porticoes.

The arching boughs unite between
 The columns of the temple green;
 And underneath the winged choirs
 Echo about their tuned fires. (505-12)

This order is organic and structured: standard trees grow as columns, branches (united as the stocks of Fairfax and Vere families) meld into a roof overhead, the floor is carpeted in green, and the birds sing around warm hearths. This natural architecture combines a sense of wild nature and structured space, ordered by a poet's metaphoric expression, not an architect's tools. Its religious but slightly pagan veneer lends this wood a divine authority that blesses the poet's expression and, by extension, his patron's rule over the space.

Yet the poet is the sole human authority in Nun Appleton's woods, and his physical merging with the wood in poetic play, unlike Lanyer's attempt to connect with her patroness, suggests his own eminence, superseding even that of his patron. Following the description of the wood, Marvell develops a form of the traditional tree catalogue over the next few stanzas, listing trees and their resident birds. Within this catalogue, he makes an oblique, passing reference to Fairfax (as an oak, stooping to hear the nightingale's song in stanza 65 and reminiscent of the lord bending to enter his house in stanza 8) and ends with an allegory of Charles I's demise in the rotten and fallen royal oak. Excepting these veiled references, the poet is alone in the woods, and, in a giddy moment of unobserved revelry, he identifies not with the house or its lord, but with the woods.

The poet reasserts himself after the two stanzas describing the fallen oak: "Thus I, easy Philosopher, / Among the Birds and Trees confer" (561-62). This philosophical "I"

quickly becomes a bird, and then a tree: “Or turn me but, and you shall see / I was but an inverted tree” (567-68). He moves from this Renaissance commonplace to that of “Nature’s mystic Book” (584), then again imagines the wood in terms of structured spaces that he alone among men inhabits: a theater (or banqueting hall), a church, a fortress, and a prison (stanzas 74-78). These structures become spaces in which he enacts his personal will to withdraw and join with primeval nature through a series of increasingly secure physical bonds with the woods: he imagines that oak leaves “embroider” him with a masque costume and foliage creates an “antic cope” (591), that draped over him, makes him “some great Prelate of the Grove” (592). Playing with imagery of “silken bondage” (614) and torture, he asks the forest to grab and hold him:

Bind me yet Woodbines in your twines,
Curl me about ye gadding Vines [...]
Do you, O Brambles, chain me too,
And courteous Briars nail me through. (609-16)

In the metaphor of the fortress (stanza 76), he strengthens the experience of physical merger with nature by emphasizing his separation from society. He writes, “How safe, methinks, and strong, behind / These trees I have encamped my mind” (601-02), where he is protected from love’s assaults, “And where the world no certain shot / Can make, or me it toucheth not” (605-06).

The physical bond the speaker forms with the woodland itself, so overt in its imagery of bondage, twining, clothing, and caressing, directly counters a connection with the “world” that cannot affect the poet in this surreal space. Poetic expression, of which he is master, enables a personal transcendence of the world. Marvell’s historical world

does come rushing back upon his exit from the wood, when Maria Fairfax interrupts the poet's solitary fishing and recalls him to the laudatory duty his poem fulfills. But for a substantial expanse, the forest in *Upon Appleton House* provides an alternative space to the estate's buildings and its owners, and the woodland space is a place of personal freedom and authority for a poet who imagines a physical merger with a Nature that exceeds the aura of the Fairfax name.

This short survey of forests in these country house poems provides a background and context for examining the ways Milton's *Paradise Regained* draws upon, mimics, and adapts the conventions of the country house wood in a cosmic struggle over authority in the banquet temptation. Jonson, Lanyer, and Marvell recognize the implications of timeless and naturalized legitimacy embedded in estate trees, parks, and groves, and Lanyer's and Marvell's speakers seek a degree of authority themselves through a physical identification with trees. Finally, these poems evidence the evolution of the genre from a celebration of patronage and the hierarchical feudal community to a poetry of withdrawal and distance that allows a degree of independent poetic authority backed by greater forces. The elements of country house poetry and the social issues it raises in *Paradise Regained* find a locus in the great hall grove and contextualize the exploration of authority that develops tension in Milton's poem. In what ways do Milton's Satan and Son engage with the question of authority and its sources latent in the country house woodland? How do the implicit hierarchies of the country house poem and the estate forest affect the stances, arguments, and ultimate understanding of his characters as they attempt to establish a definition of lordship that is at once above matters of human society and also a model for it?

Empty Authority: Country House Hospitality in Paradise Regained

The country house poems of Jonson, Lanyer, and Marvell struggle with the social dynamics of rank and the relationships between poets and their lords, articulating both the centripetal strength of social obligations and a centrifugal urge for release from them. They reveal a frustration with discrepancies of rank, a desire to identify with the lord, yet a willingness to comply with social expectations to a degree beneficial to their own station in life. These are the human weaknesses of which Satan is keenly aware, and which figure prominently in Milton's adaptation of the country house genre to a poem of spiritual edification.

The great-hall grove literally and figuratively houses the country house tradition in *Paradise Regained*. Keeble sees in the Son "a disregard for material provision, an unworldliness, essential to the wilderness way" (96), and Satan does too. His strategy is to lure the Son from desolate wildness and what he claims is the neglect of his Father to the easy practices of social grace and an acceptance of the structures that create its illusion. The goal is not to get the Son to eat per se, but to trap the Son into accepting the obligations that accompany eating, to accept the strictures of English social hierarchies and a role of subservient recipient. The great-hall grove makes this temptation possible. Recognizing the great hall grove reveals Satan's manipulation of the gestures of hospitality and the familiar conventions of the country house poem, which conceal in their social niceties the accompanying implications of duty, obligation, and rank.

Satan begins his subtle manipulation with a simple hypothetical question: "Tell me, if Food were now before thee set, / Would'st thou not eat?" (2.320-21). Observing the great-hall grove and Satan's appearance, the Son reads the situation and, in his

forthright fashion, cuts to the heart of the power dynamics of country house discourse: “Thereafter as I like / The giver” (2.321-22).¹¹⁷ He directly addresses the situation for what it is: that of gift giving and the power dynamics implicit in it, which Satan tries to subsume in his passive construction and which the country house convention of *sponte sua* nature hides. Forced to address the undercurrent of his proposal, Satan quickly raises the topics of duty and service (2.325-26) and steps behind Nature, the purveyor of all good. In a feigned submission belied by his lord’s attire, he tempts the Son with talk of the Son’s lordship, his entitlement to all earthly creation. The Son must “only deign to sit and eat” (2.336).

The food appears at this moment, “A Table richly spread, in regal mode, / With dishes pil’d, and meats of noblest sort / And savor, Beasts of chase, or Fowl of game” (2.340-42). These are the foods of the king and aristocracy, culled from private and restricted lands owned by the privileged. Beautiful youths, perfumed breezes, and soft music accompany the fish and wine that follow in a lulling atmosphere meant to distract the Son, as is Satan’s attempt to confuse the issue with talk of clean and unclean foods. He twice more invites the Son to accept of the gifts of the “Spirits of Aire, and Woods, and Springs / Thy gentle Ministers, who come to pay / Thee homage, and acknowledge thee thir Lord” (2.374-76). The Son again answers directly, accepting the title but rejecting Satan’s undermining gesture: “Shall I receive by gift what of my own, / When and where likes me best, I can command?” (2.381-82). He presses the question of rightful lordship of all things, including this great hall.

This question and the debate over how to characterize Satan’s invitation address

¹¹⁷ Dubrow observes, “Clothes also establish genre as a form of social communication and interaction” (“The Masquing of Genre” 70).

the social tensions inherent in country house discourse. Satan appropriates country house poetry (or misappropriates the genre, as Dubrow might argue) to blur the clear power dynamics of gift giving and to capitalize on the ambiguity of social relations in the genre. The country house poem's conflicted attitudes toward rank provide malleable material for the Archfiend's prevarication and equivocation, and its complicity in accepted structures of society glosses it with a benign amity. Yet his reliance on the surface features of the country house poem leads him to stumble on the complexities of its discourse. Lewalski observes that Milton's Satan is "cunning, brilliant even, but ultimately literal-minded, unable to fathom God's metaphors" (*Milton's Brief Epic* 162). He also misses the undercurrent of social criticism in country house poetry and misreads his role as the generous aristocratic lord who feigns a humble rhetoric of service. In fabricating a country house poem of his own, Satan instead reveals a flimsy constructed artifice that in its performance crumbles before the authority of God. Satan's understanding lacks the subtext of later seventeenth-century social change and the intertextuality of its expressive forms.

The potential allure of country house poetry has as much to do with its subtle criticism of the contemporary status quo as it does with a celebratory depiction of a supposedly golden past. As a genre, it aims to define ideal lordship. And, in contrast to the expected pastoral poles of country and city, country house poems set their celebrated manors in opposition to other country houses (R. Williams 28). "To Penshurst" famously opens with a line, "Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show" (1), that inaugurates a string of negative comparisons and presents the fourteenth-century manor against a foil of so-called prodigy houses, built in later centuries and often in fashionable Continental

architectural styles. Infused with what some saw as arrogant ostentation, royalist opulence, and foreign aesthetics, the rival houses of the country house poem symbolize the rejection of traditional hospitality and the embrace of a new social and political order, of the opting-out of the traditional social contract by the aristocracy.¹¹⁸

The sophisticated hospitality Satan offers is the dazzling materiality of the prodigy house, of the retired Cavalier lord shunning the commons, feasting on dainty foods with eminent guests. His country house certainly lacks an element of down-to-earth English revelry, the “slightly grotesque heartiness about hospitality-poems, a smell of gravy that is absent from the usual decorous verse of the period” (Turner 144). Satan serves shellfish, not venison. That these delicacies are exotic, not produced self-sufficiently on the estate grounds or carried in by humble tenants (as is the case in Jonson’s poem) further indicates that this great hall is part of a prodigy house, not a medieval manor.

Satan manipulates both these opposing ideals—that of the elite lord enjoying in dignified solitude the finer things in life, and that of the lord of the people sharing his plenty—in his own country house offering to the Son. As host, he presents himself as the kind country lord inviting the Son to partake in a ritual of community and in glad acceptance of a social contract that fosters harmony, yet at the same time, the feast,

¹¹⁸ Wayne discusses such houses, like Sutton House and Longleat, built by Tudor administrators (including Cecil) and modeled on classical and Italian architecture (47 ff). He traces how Jonson’s balanced style in lines describing the prodigy houses varies from the looser style he employs in describing a “natural” Penshurst (34). On a similar note, Leah Marcus notes that Comus moves his “base of operations” from the frightening forest to a stunning structure within it: “What his ‘*stately palace*’ is doing in the middle of the Shropshire wilds is an interesting question in itself” (187). Conversely, Julie Sanders finds that “one of the richest sites for comprehending this disruption and disjunction of authority resides not in Comus’s palace, which only appears in the latter stages of the masque, but in the forest setting that dominates earlier scenes” (2). The debate about where authority resides is intensified in *Paradise Regained*, then, in its combined palace-wood, the great-hall grove.

servants, and secluded grove invite the Son to be that retired lord, the elite guest attended upon, the superior ruler. Both alternatives are snares. The paradox deliberately confuses the power dynamic in an attempt to entrap the Son, drawing on the ideals of hospitality in earlier country house poetry. Perez Zagorin argues that Milton's politics "incorporate deference to worldly rank" (118), yet only when paired with a Protestant-tinted concept of virtue, one exemplified by the "the aristocratic ideal of self-conquest" as embodied by the Son in *Paradise Regained* (137). Satan is, like the parvenus of the English upper echelon or builders of prodigy houses, a mere pretender and a proponent not of dignified self-control, but of ostentatious self-indulgence. The Son recognizes Satan as a rascal of a lord and adopts a straightforward strategy of negation: "*Paradise Regained* accumulates a series of no's—the Son seems determined not to do anything" (Knoppers 138). He refuses to play along.

The air of playing and theatricality that swirls around the passage also draws on aristocratic culture, specifically the seventeenth-century feast and the masque. Clear thematic connections exist between Milton's own dramatic pieces, the masques *Comus* and *Arcades*, and *Paradise Regained*, not the least of which is the forest setting. Yet Milton's discomfort with the masque form and its royalist contexts is illuminated in studies tracing his work to "reform" the masque into a vehicle promoting royal and aristocratic restraint respectful of the Protestant conscience. Dubrow believes that Milton felt the draw of such glamorous genres as high pastoral and romance and that the banquet scene in *Paradise Regained* is another instance in which "he lashes himself to the mast as he sails by" ("The Masquing of Genre" 67). The scene hints at the powerful temptation of the courtly masque and gives Martz's term for it, a "masque of temptation," a double

edge as it aptly captures the seductive theatricality of the scene.

Marks of the masque abound in the banquet scene itself and include elaborate scenery (notably a green “woody Scene,” popular in Jacobean masques), Satan’s fancy costume, a cast of spirits, music, a hint of anti-masque in the Son’s resisting arguments, and the suddenly disappearing feast reminiscent of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.¹¹⁹ The masque elements center on the antagonist, notes Knoppers, and “While Satan seems to do all the acting, he also continually presses the Son to say or do something dramatically interesting” (36).¹²⁰ That the Son will not play Satan’s game of guile but simply refuses to accept his terms makes the poem more than a battle of wits, but a battle of wills that demonstrates of the steadfastness of “truth” against empty “seeming.” The taint of performance, of artificiality, in the banquet scene undermines Satan.

Satan inherits the taint of theatricality not only with the masque, but with the banquet. Stuart banquets at the Whitehall Banqueting House (designed by Inigo Jones in the Italianate style and completed in 1622) commonly ended with masque performances in the same space and were strongly associated by strict Protestant believers with a corrupt and Catholic-leaning monarchy.¹²¹ A reference to “the daily Scene effeminate” (4.142) of Roman theaters in Book 4 adopts this attitude. Patricia Fumerton discusses at length the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century social occasion of the aristocratic masque and the related “void,” a sweet course served after a feast in a specially constructed hall

¹¹⁹ Patricia Fumerton believes that elaborate scenery in masques often implies a hidden king or representative of monarchy, and by Jacobean times, such a secluded scene, “a green setting,” was often of a grove or arbor (148).

¹²⁰ Alternatively, David Norbrook thinks “Satan functions somewhat like a royalist agent provocateur trying to extort a seditious statement” from the Son (133)—an interesting suggestion given the banquet scene’s similarities to Jonson’s “Inviting a Friend to Supper” (see note below).

¹²¹ For Milton and other proponents of regicide, the Banqueting House must have been a satisfyingly fitting venue for Charles I’s execution in 1649.

separate from the rest of the house and eaten only by the most elite guests. Most cogent to this essay is the void's emptiness. Often comprised of sugar creations made to look like objects or real food and supplemented by sweetened wine, the void was ephemeral, frequently destroyed in a ritualistic feeding frenzy as it was being eaten. Fumerton connects the void to the masque and the masque's role as an ostentatious void-like entertainment, the set of which was also often destroyed after the performance.¹²² Robert Cummings notes the related aristocratic practice of "ante-suppers," or opulent displays of food laid out but discarded before the actual meal was served (108).

That "both table and provision vanished quite" (402) at the Son's final refusal links the scene to these displays of worldly wealth and waste, and Satan's response to the Son's obstinacy marks a continued attempt to situate their power struggle within a specifically social context.¹²³ He claims to be offended at a rude refusal to partake of a freely offered gift:

If of that power I bring thee voluntary
 What I might have bestowed on whom I pleased,
 And rather opportunely in this place
 Chose to impart to thy apparent need,

¹²² Voids were served with other performances as well, as evidenced by a letter sent to Sir Dudley Carleton at the Hague, May 24, 1619, recording the performance at Whitehall of Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* for the French ambassador. The letter mentions an intermission during which "the players ceased till the French all refreshed them with sweetmeates brought on Chinay voiders, & wyne & ale in bottells, after the players begann anewe" (McManaway 19).

¹²³ Given the insubstantiality of the feast and its disingenuous host, the banquet scene may also be influenced by another of Jonson's poems: epigram 101, or "Inviting a Friend to Supper." Like "To Penshurst," the poem details an elaborate feast, and its genre as an invitation (which Fowler includes as a subcategory of the estate poem), evokes Satan's repeated invitations to the Son to "sit and eat." As in *Paradise Regained*, Jonson's feast never progresses beyond the invitation, and the speaker is dishonest in tempting his friend to the meal: "I'll tell you of more, and lie, so you will come" (17). Cummings discusses the feast's connections to the banquets of the wealthy in seventeenth-century England and argues that Jonson's supper is an "imaginary meal of plenty" (106) that allows him, in a poem about imaginary liberality, to address social and political limits on personal liberty.

Why shouldst thou not accept it? (394-98)

“In this place” draws attention to the special “woody Scene” of the masque meal, and despite the clues that suggest this scene’s duplicity and emptiness, Satan attempts still to present himself as the generous country lord answering his poor neighbor’s needs. But his admission that this interaction is about bestowing invokes the power dynamics and social obligations of giving and suggests not charity, but manipulation. Voids and masques operated on the concept of the gift, as when Charles I offered masque performances as privileged entertainment to courtiers and friends (Fumerton 163); additionally, masque production, including Milton’s for the Bridgewater family, was an exchange of gifts in the patronage system. Satan’s masque-like, void-like banquet is a worldly one, heavy with built-in obligations of deference to a generous patron.

The Son recognizes the worldliness of the adversary’s offer and bases his refusal of it on an altogether different void—a spiritual one that centers on the concept of his being as a vessel to be filled with God’s will. In *Milton’s Brief Epic*, Lewalski fully explains Milton’s heterodox beliefs on the nature of the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity in the one person of Christ. His view of the immutability and indivisibility of God leads him to view the Son not as coessential, but “radically inferior” (155), drawing his divinity from “the will and conscious donation of the Father” (147). Milton also places significant emphasis on the concept of kenosis, by which Christ was understood to have renounced the glory of divinity, if not the power and abilities it enabled. Key to this interpretation are the biblical verse of Philippians 2.6-8 and the term *sesse exinanivit*, which Milton translates as “he emptied himself” (148), following the tradition of other biblical scholars.

The act of emptying, of renouncing glory, stems from the humility that makes the Son a special servant of the Father. He is the *lord of hosts*, leading God's armies, and a sacrifice, *the host*, for humanity. The act also engages in the intense dramatic concern in *Paradise Regained* with the struggle between Satan and the Son.¹²⁴ We have seen how the earthly void lacks substance and is created to be destroyed; the void presented in the person of the Son is filled by God's will and fulfilled by a mission to save. The purpose of the Son's wilderness exile is to discover how. The active form of the statement "he emptied himself" asserts a willful submission and renunciation of personal will, the antithesis of the attitudes of personal entitlement enacted in the practices of the masque, the void, and the ante-supper at Satan's banquet and upper-class English social occasions. Satan's attempt to get the Son to eat intends to fill him with his own demonic will. The Son's hunger, the allegory of his emptiness, is ultimately relieved not by the gifts of Satan, but the will of God, as he resolves even before facing the banquet: "yet God / Can satisfy that need some other way, / Though hunger still remain" (2.253-55). This image of the spiritual void filled with God's will enacts Milton's own Protestant ethic and directly counters what he sees as the idolatry of the hierarchical Anglican church and the royalists whose voids, banqueting houses, and masques encourage social ceremony and sensual indulgence over private conscience.

But the banquet scene in *Paradise Regained* counters these extratextual cultural valences in its adaptation of the great hall into a great hall *grove*. The scene's links to masques and voids reveal the aristocratic vice and sinister moral undercurrent of Satan's

¹²⁴ Despite varying etymologies, the four senses of *host*, including those meaning one who lodges or entertains, one offered as a sacrifice, and an army, assimilated into one form early in English development (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

country house rhetoric. Within the text, the greatest authorial challenge (in the sense of Milton the poet and God the author) to Satan's temptation of the Son looms over the banquet scene: the pleasant grove. Once the food and wait staff vanish, we are left with the forest.

From the moment the Son follows the sounds of birds into the grove, he and Milton's readers face an interpretive challenge posed by the ambiguous space itself. The grove as described in the banquet scene is more than a paradox of wildness and order (a combination characteristic of Adam and Eve's bower); it combines naturalness and structure. In Milton's poetry, "The unhallowed is associated with tangle, obstruction, overgrowth: the 'tangled thickets' of the *Nativity Ode*, 'the gadding vine o'ergrown' of *Lycidas*, the fear of nature 'strangled with her waste fertility' in *Comus*" (Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape* 279). The suggestion of wildness may indeed make the grove in *Paradise Regained* suspicious "to a Superstitious eye" (2.296). The antithesis is ordered nature, God's creation from chaos (in orthodox understanding, though not Milton's) which, when managed devoutly by humankind, also models a correct social order. The mention of superstition may function as a warning justified by Satan's sudden appearance two lines later, but can also be interpreted as a challenge, for it is not clear whether the reader, or the Son, *should* be suspicious of the space itself: Is this grove an outpost of Pandemonium, or does it belong to God's handmaid Nature, benign and pure? The uncertainty reflects the challenge faced by the Son throughout *Paradise Regained*: to distinguish between the sinister and godly, human will and spiritual righteousness, seeming and Truth. The great hall grove engages in this interpretive challenge in a way that is particular to seventeenth-century social and religious developments.

The juxtaposition of the natural and the artificial, of Nature and Art, plays a significant part in the ethical discussion of man's relationship to creation in country house poetry.¹²⁵ Yet in the great hall grove of *Paradise Regained* the Son and the reader encounter both the blessed and the sinister skillfully blended rather than clearly opposed. Jonson claims that Penshurst "joy'st in better marks, of soil, of air, / Of wood, of water; therein [...] fair" (7-8), rather than fancy pillars, roofs, and courtyards.¹²⁶ Marvell equates Nun Appleton to a bird's nest and turtle's shell, rejecting the columns and high ceilings of foreign-influenced mansions (st. 1-2). Milton's grove echoes the wood of Nun Appleton, where natural elements form columns, ceilings, courtyards, and walks, and the birds reside inside. How do we interpret this great-hall grove?

Milton's understanding of creation provides one signpost: his materialism, a belief that creation is *ex Deo*, not *ex nihil*, explains the calm attraction the Son has for the grove and the degree to which the natural elements of the space can be trusted. An *ex Deo* conception of creation figures all matter as originating in God the Creator, not in a chaotic lump of unformed matter, and it implies that "matter [is] intrinsically pure and holy rather than a source of evil" (Zagorin 101). In this understanding, the natural world in which Satan presents his feast (and which he attempts to misappropriate when he claims to be a middleman in procuring Nature's goods for the Son), is infused with the innate goodness of God. In Milton's great-hall grove, evil does not infuse or operate through the natural elements as it seems to infect Spenser's Wood of Errour and Bower

¹²⁵ For example, Fitter notes how Milton's contemporaries Henry Vaughn and Marvell "counterpose the sacramentality of open natural landscape to the sterility of conventional enclosure" (*Poetry, Space, Landscape* 237) in poetry flanked by centuries of conflict over landownership and use.

¹²⁶ Wayne notes the "double sense in which the poem refers to Nature": the Sidneys' "title to Penshurst is an assertion of private ownership of Nature," and the so-called "magic" that makes nature produce "is only a substitute for the real process that produces abundance, and for the relation which allows the Sidneys to be the beneficiaries of that abundance" (126).

of Bliss, calling for the utter destruction of the latter. Instead, it is a space operated upon as in Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*. Just as Spenser's forest squires find their legacy of nobility cannot ensure their success in the forest, Satan, perverting such feudal ideals, finds that the grove will not support his efforts.

When the fallen archangel offers the Son (God's greatest creation in Milton's theology) a meal of empty artifice, he conducts himself and his masque as if in a great hall, neglecting the grove and its natural—and holy—implications. The grove is God's and the Son's, and try as Satan might to infuse it with worldliness, it rebuffs him. Much like country house poetry's fascination with the Nature versus Art motif, *Paradise Regained* incorporates in the great hall grove a confrontation between Nature and Art. But it defines Art more decisively than many poems as *artifice*, exemplified by an art form, the country house poem itself, that celebrates aristocratic status and its values. Country house poems of the earlier half of the century (though also including *Upon Appleton House*) celebrate houses and lords they identify as natural in origin—their source materials, including lumber and family lineage, tied to the land. These poems sneer at those houses identified with architecture, nonnative design, and newly raised aristocrats. The poets seem to see these estates not as stately English oaks, but as showy and invasive weeds despite a link between such building trends and royal taste, as seen in Whitehall, for example. Milton takes a cue from Marvell's juxtaposition of woods and house to oppose the natural grove and its Lord to the great hall and its lord, negating the primacy of social structures and any authority of aristocratic artifice in favor of one divine authority.

So where is the poet's place at the table? Where does Milton himself fit in? Is he

complicit in an act of art that, while quietly celebrating the Son's maturity, employs a discourse associated with the corrupt aristocracy and its worldliness? Or is his appropriation of country house poetry—and application of it in the service of Satan—a demonstration of the degradation of older poetic, political, social, and religious forms? One way to answer the question of where Milton fits in is to note that he does not: the poem lacks the poet's voice outside a handful of first-person pronouns, "having given over the role of authoritative critic and judge to his hero, Jesus" (Lewalski, *Life* 512). The poet is not the guest in this poem, instead placing the country house host and his guest in direct conversation with each other and ultimately identifying with the guest, his humble Lord. Given the prominence of the poet *ipse* in the country house poems examined earlier, Milton's strategy is subtle and innovative: he replaces the poet-guest with the Lord himself and allows the country house lord an active presence. The result reveals the power dynamics inherent in country house discourse and its temptingly nostalgic view of social harmony and complacency, formerly mitigated through the poet's person as a liminal figure enjoying the fruits of the lord's status and empowered to praise that status in print. Spenser reserves the forest of Book 6 for the georgic poet, but Milton relinquishes it to God, looking instead to inherit the earth through his identification with the Son.

As the Son refuses "all inadequate, partial, or erroneous versions or parodies of himself and his mission" as presented by Satan (Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic* 161), Milton similarly refuses the role of obliging spokesperson for a worldliness represented by country house discourse. By stepping outside the poem and declining to mitigate between an idealized social arrangement and power structures supporting it—and instead

assigning such employment to the artifice of Satan—Milton rejects the ethic of the aristocratic great hall. Instead he offers a natural image of singularity more suitable to an emphasis on the spirit, rather than the world, and to the individual conscience, rather than society: a tree. In Book 4, after Satan offers him the glory of Rome, the Son rejects “this grandeur and majestic show” (4.110) and “the daily Scene effeminate” (4.142) of luxurious Roman life immediately before characterizing his reign in terms of a natural liberty:

Know therefore when my season comes to sit
 On *David's* Throne, it shall be like a tree
 Spreading and overshadowing all the Earth,
 Or as a stone that shall to pieces dash
 All Monarchies besides throughout the world,
 And of my Kingdom there shall be no end[.] (4.146-51)

In direct opposition to the collective sin of Rome, he describes his “season” in singular and natural terms. This tree recalls the prominent trees in country house poems yet differs markedly from that tradition.

The image of the single tree, as we have seen before in “To Penshurst” and “Description of Cooke-ham,” carries social and cultural associations of lineage and legitimacy and works to create the illusion of autonomy from history. Jonson mentions two individual oaks: one planted November 30, 1554, to mark the birth of Sir Philip Sidney (13-14), and the other the “lady’s oak” (18). The trees obviously mark the legitimacy of aristocratic birth and connect it to the land, and they suggest a long-lived family presence on the estate to mask the Sidneys’ relatively recent acquisition of

Penshurst Place. Similarly, the oak embraced by both the countess and the poet in “Description of Cooke-ham” stands as a representative and a recipient of the lady’s authority, much as the Son is both representative and recipient of the Father’s authority in Milton’s theology.

The Son invokes the longevity of stone and ancient trees in his description of his coming reign, yet his tree, rather than serving to mark his greatness, serves humankind. Its distinguishing features are not height and age, but singularity and breadth. “Spreading and overshadowing all the Earth” (4.148), it transcends borders, walls, and boundaries, sheltering the world even as the Son destroys the corrupt monarchies and societies within it. Unlike woodland spaces depicted as structured groves or timbered great halls, this single tree is a shelter that extends God’s will rather than cultivating worldliness (the great hall) or attempting to keep it at bay (Marvel’s grove near Nun Appleton).¹²⁷ As a version of that single tree, the royalist oak draws on ideas of natural hierarchy to establish superiority over the rest of creation. The Son reclaims the tree image from the monarchy, and its unifying presence erases distinctions between the worldly and spiritual and negates the concerns of the social world. In choosing the single tree as one of the images representing his reign, the Son rejects social analogies as well as worldly power, instead reverting to a purely natural image that links heaven and earth, the new Tree of Life.

At the beginning of the banquet episode, immediately before noting his hunger, the Son muses, “Where will this end?” (2.245), signaling the significance of the scene to the poem’s central concerns: the identity of Christ and the implications of his intercession on earth. In the end, there is no table at which to sit, but perhaps instead something closer

¹²⁷ In examining the woods of *Comus*, Sean Keilen notes how Milton’s forests are ambiguous in their nature as both open and closed, as places of wandering and confinement (151).

to a scene in *Paradise Lost*. Before the fall of the world and its continual decay to Restoration prurience, Adam and Eve share nature's bounty with Raphael in a "Silvan Lodge" (5.377) of arching boughs in which "Rais'd of grassy turf / Thir Table was, and mossy seats had round" (5.391-92). Milton's *Paradise Regained* looks forward to the fulfillment of the Son's mission to return paradise to earth. In withdrawing from his poetic narrative and employing the panegyric genre of the country house poem, he quietly praises the humility of a Lord who will be the holy Host and whose rejection of worldly forms informs Milton's own sense of personal conscience and poetic choices. Paul Cubeta notes that "the fact that most of Ben Jonson's non-dramatic poetry is social verse reveals how seriously he took the responsibility of the artist toward his community" (14). The fact that Milton's verse rejects social convention, as it so markedly does in the banquet scene and mock country house poem of *Paradise Regained*, shows how seriously Milton saw his role as a spiritual guide for England. Like the Son's enjoyment of the angelic feast at the end of the poem, Milton's spiritual rewards come with rejecting the temptations of society's sins and the accompanying poetic forms that inhibit pursuit of the soul's salvation.

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