

**“TO O’ERTHROW LAW” AND “O’ERWHELM CUSTOM”<sup>1</sup>:  
SHAKESPEARE’S PLAY WITH THE PASTORAL**

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***Abstract:** The paper proposes a novel outlook on the pastoral mode practiced by early modern authors, with which Shakespeare experimented. We argue that the classical (ancient) pastoral which was replicated by other early modern texts was employed differently by Shakespeare. We first read *As You Like It* and *The Winter’s Tale* as examples of this experimentation, which departs from the classical norms of the pastoral, and then we suggest that Shakespeare brings this experimentation to the next level, by working on the evolution of the pattern from the early romantic comedy to the late romance. Thus, following scholarship, we show that, in Shakespeare, the expected idealism of the pastoral is downplayed and nuanced by irony in *As You Like It* and by a baroque construction in *The Winter’s Tale*. Our paper then focuses on the evolution of the Shakespearean pastoral from *As You Like It* (where it focuses on a unique, mythological character, Rosalind-Ganymede, who channels all the energies of the play and orchestrates the entire plot) to *The Winter’s Tale* (where the pastoral works through multiple subjects, who instrumentalise the plot; even if Perdita-Flora is a central, mythical character, other characters/instruments are indispensable, like Hermione, Paulina, Autolycus, etc.). Last but not least, the paper demonstrates that Shakespeare’s departure from the classical pastoral norms is not only a literary-aesthetic choice, but an expression of a new early modern awareness about space, which reflects new social, economic and demographic realities.*

***Keywords:** baroque, early modern realities, experimentation, pastoral, space, topography*

**1. Introduction: Pastoralism in early modern literature - A cartography**

The pastoral style was frequented by many writers during the early modern period. Going naturally in the spirit of the revival of a genre that had acquired authority since the classical Antiquity, the pastoral contained both a spatial and a temporal dimension. It was the tale of a natural environment (almost) untouched by humans and of a bygone age, of happiness and tranquillity. The emphasis on the escapist nature of the pastoral, which characterizes traditional scholarship of this genre, started to be nuanced, or even questioned, with the hypotheses proposed by critics like Paul Alpers, for example. In *What is Pastoral?*, Alpers advances the

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes from Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* (IV.1.1640, 1641). These and subsequent quotes from *The Winter’s Tale* are from Shakespeare’s *Romances and Poems*, edited by David Bevington.

idea that pastoral, like other, more modern literary genres, is heterogeneous, dynamic, has many versions, and a rewarding reading would exclude the conventional, simplistic approach that focuses only on predictable contrasts (city-country, civilization-nature, etc.). To demonstrate the need for a nuanced interpretation, Alpers (1982: 441) borrows a concept advanced by literary theorist Kenneth Burke, “the representative anecdote”, i.e. pastoral is a phenomenon which is specific, not generic, which relies on a historical example and grows by transforming and adapting the conventional patterns laid out by previous instances. The representative anecdote of the pastoral can be the setting (the bucolic landscape) or the characters populating this setting (the shepherds). Alpers opts for the latter, arguing that the landscape – which is not a particular depiction, but rather the projection of a state of mind – comes second to the shepherds’ lives. He also encourages scholarship not to regard pastoral as a genre, but as a stylised mode, which uses the countryside only as a pretext and is, in fact, more concerned, in its dialectic, with politics (manifestations of culture, the court, human relations, etc.).

This step forward in the theorization of the pastoral is challenged by more recent criticism, which rejects the hypothesis that the pastoral’s long-lasting impact and success could have been achieved if the genre dealt only in mere abstractions. Countering Alpers’ ideas, Jeffrey Theis’ *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral Nation* provides a thought-provoking analysis of the early modern pastoral as an emerging form of ecocriticism. More specifically, Theis analyses examples of the sylvan pastoral (when the pastoral is set in a forest) in the context of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when woodland was instrumental in the formation of English individual and national identity. Exploring several early modern plays, among which Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, Theis relates them to concerns about deforestation, forest law, land ownership and the human relationship to nature. Most significantly, he reads forests as dynamic spaces, in use by both the rich and the poor: whereas the poor migrated to forests in the social context of rising population, the rich used the woodland as their playgrounds where they could practice hunting. Furthermore, Ken Hiltner writes *What Else is Pastoral*, a study in which he goes past the metaphoric worth and figurative mode of the pastoral and invites readers to find the real landscapes behind the symbolic ones, in a more environmentally oriented approach. Hiltner argues that the reality of the early modern pastoral was already one in which ecological concerns started to take a concrete shape, as massive deforestation, air pollution, urban expansion, land enclosures and insensible land use were acknowledged and a need to raise awareness about these issues was palpable. As he (2011: 4) puts it, “Renaissance nature writing [...] works best when it neither mimics nor represents [nature]”. In his view, the pastoral turns away from representation, employing a non-mimetic, “gestural strategy” (idem: 25). In this context, authors of pastorals in the early modern period were gesturing at nature by observing (and possibly warning about) its growing absence. In other words, they were concerned with literal landscapes even if they didn’t deem it necessary to describe them, as the Romantics would do later on. This concern, if not ecological in the sense we mean it today, was epistemological, giving rise to a modern consciousness about nature.

In a less explicitly environmental vein, other recent studies about agrarian landscapes in literature suggest that they reflect the social and economic values of the early modern people. For Charlotte Scott (2014: 12), the imagery related to husbandry, whether understood literally or metaphorically, was meant to respond to moral imperatives, as well as to economic urgencies. She (idem: 6) explains that,

for the early modern man, nature was not only a landscape or a state of mind, because “people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relation with nature”. Landscape in literature is a channel of communication, used to convey social roles and relationships, which are “rehearsed through economic practices” (idem: 12). Therefore, it can be argued that the early modern literary interest in pastoralism is a reflection of a new geographic-social-economic awareness about the changing spaces of the countryside and the roles played by humans in these spaces.

Both these latter directions, theorized by Hiltner and Scott, are in fact the result of the spatial turn, the growth of interest in space, not only as geography, but as a lived experience. Cultural and, more specifically, literary geography is an interdisciplinary tool employed to discuss space in a continuum, where this physical feature is synonymous with cultural concepts such as representation, mobility, process and performance, as Sheila Hones (2022: 12) explains. Scholarship has often analysed space as a complementary dimension of time, a framework at the intersection between geography and history. This interest favoured the emergence of ecocriticism and geopoetics, but has also validated the mapping of both real and imagined spaces, of public and private spaces, going for a very broad interpretation of what space is and how it works in literature.

It can be argued that the spatial turn has determined the reconsideration of the function of the pastoral, and it is probably not a coincidence that the rise of literary geographies and the interpretive shift in pastoral scholarship occurred at about the same time, in the 1980s. According to Julie Sanders (2011: 9), the instruments of geography can turn cultural phenomena from general to specific and, more importantly, they can offer valuable information about how culture employs and makes sense of space. Literary geography, therefore, brings to the fore the processes that build the cultural phenomena, that “are at work in different spaces and places, and on different levels and scales” (ibid.). It documents complex interactions, not only between people, but, more significantly, between people and spatial concepts and structures, whether they are the well-known country-city binary pair, specific habitats (forests, fields, and seashores) or micro-geographies connected to private spaces or to professional-functional spaces that may well include the playhouse and the stage.

In close connection to Sanders’ micro-geographies is Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen’s (2016: 3-8) hierarchy of space types in Shakespearean drama. The scholars distinguish between seven distinct yet overlapping spaces: “(1) structural/topological space, (2) stage space/setting/locality, (3) linguistic/poetic space, (4) social/gendered space, (5) early modern geographies, (6) cultural spaces/contact zones, and (7) the material world/cultural imaginary.” Of these, most relevant for our discussion is the topological space, defined by boundaries whose crossing push the plot forward, creating structural patterns (or spatial enclaves) which are represented on stage and which allow for less formal, class-ridden social interactions. This aspect of space is also the focus of Karl Bühler’s theory on the relationship between imagination and various forms of *deixis*, i.e. topological space is closely preoccupied with the linguistic means by which “the things to be imagined are drawn *into* the space that the audience shares with the performers” (Habermann and Witen 2016: 4-5). Comparatively, stage space is focused on performance, on what happens on stage, as well as on “how specific places and localities are evoked on stage” (idem: 5). From this perspective, theatre

combines the real with the imagined, creating a “thirdspace”, i.e. a multi-dimensional conception of reality that influences social practices.

Overlapping topological space and stage space, Tim Fitzpatrick looks at a series of early modern plays particularly in terms of stage directions and identifies three separate areas: “here” (i.e. on the stage), “outwards” and “inwards” for characters moving out of the stage and into an inner space (e.g. a study, a bedroom, etc.) respectively. Postulating that “early modern playwrights, actors, and audiences shared a sophisticated sense of space and place in performance” (2011: 247), Fitzpatrick explains the complex ways in which the physical characteristics of the early modern stage reflected the playwrights’ ability to guide the audience’s attention through the changing topology of the play, resulting in an engaging experience.

In what follows, we will take a closer look at *As You Like It* and *The Winter’s Tale* as examples of romantic pastorals and the ways in which Shakespeare experiments with the pastoral conventions by having his characters literally or metaphorically cross various boundaries, from topological borders through social class limitations to stage/theatre demarcations.

## 2. *As You Like It* – a pastoral experiment

As many critics have already noted, in the pastoral literary conventions, the countryside in general – or the forest in particular – represents a space of freedom, opposite to the sophisticated rules and the harsh politics of the court/ city. Among them, Juliet Dusinberre (2020: 161) writes that forest-life is generally idealized, considered simpler and purer, with people living closely to one another, to nature and to God; at the same time, life in the forest can only be fully appreciated precisely because it coexists with city-life. Yet Shakespeare constantly plays with idealized views of the (sylvan) pastoral, highlighting its artificiality and – as we will explore in what follows – subverting the positive but subjective appreciation of country-life offered by city-dwellers and courtiers.

It is thus not by chance that *As You Like It* opens in an in-between space – the de Boys country estate – neither in the city nor in the forest, where Orlando deplores his being kept “rustically at home”, “stayed at home unkempt”, his “keeping” no better than “the stalling of an ox” (I.1.6-10). Importantly, all quotations from *As You Like It* are from *The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series. Complete Works* (2020). From the very beginning of the play, rusticity is associated with the domestic space of the home (an implied “here”, on the stage), with financial and educational lacks. Moreover, the home/stall parallel points to Orlando’s belittling himself through the implied comparison to an ox, an animal traditionally used for agricultural labour and valuable only through its physical strength. We are thus encouraged to see the countryside through Orlando’s eyes as a negative space that entails the demeaning of its inhabitants.

In the same scene, however, Shakespeare paints the first image of a pastoral setting, and an idealized one at that, challenging the initial negative description of country life by Orlando. When discussing news from the court, Charles informs Oliver that “the old Duke” (I.1.108) has found refuge in the forest and, together with the men who followed him into exile, lives a life that recalls not just the legendary Robin Hood, but also a golden age when time could be easily wasted, work- and worry-free:

“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.” (I.1.108-113)

The forest becomes an allegorical space of freedom, “a holiday space”, “away from the ‘working-day world’ and the harsh realities of the court” (Sanders 2011: 65). At the same time, through the reference to Robin Hood, the Forest of Arden becomes not just a substitute for Sherwood Forest, but also a mythical space, further emphasized later by cross-dressed Rosalind’s adoption of a mythological name (Ganymede). The scene encodes in the forest an evocation of the golden age, which translates into a nostalgia of a simple way of life, as well as of “merry” times long past which, like the carefree age of childhood, cannot be fully recovered but only copied, imitated. By the middle of the play, this melancholy perception of time turns downright depressing, as it is developed in Jaques’ monologues recounting his meeting with Touchstone and the latter’s bawdy time “tale” (II.7.23-33) that puns on the more sexual “tail” (cf. Partridge 2005: 255, 257, 278-79) and ends in either death or venereal disease, and Jaques’ own view on the seven ages of man (II.7.143-167), which relies on a series of lacks (“*Sans* teeth, *sans* eyes, *sans* taste, *sans* everything”, II.7.167, original emphasis).

As for the forest and its new occupants, Theis (2009: 77) reads the play as voicing “a collective anxiety” about the mobility of people in late Elizabethan England, about “forest settlers in particular” and about “people uprooted from their ‘proper’ place” in general. The result is that the characters see and define the Forest of Arden differently but “at their own peril” (idem: 36). For instance, playing with the pastoral mode, Shakespeare further develops the idyllic perception of forest-life with Duke Senior’s subjective description of the woodland experience, where nature becomes an astute teacher for the man who – it must be noted – has lived a pampered life at court, albeit among “painted pomp” (II.1.3) and “public haunt”, and now finds cheerfulness in the chilly weather and wisdom in the elements: “And this our life, exempt from public haunt, / Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything.” (II.1.15-17) Above all, what these lines reveal is the fact that nature – and, by extension, a simple life in close community with it, according to the seasons – can only be appreciated in contrast with and in the absence of the sophisticated court and its hypocritical politics. For Duke Senior, Arden becomes a living entity, a space with a ‘voice’ of its own, thus reframing his experience of reality: it is the exile into the woodland that enables him to reconsider his background, his social status and, ultimately, his very life.

However, the way in which the Duke values the forest is through what it can offer him, namely shelter and food. As a result, what preoccupies him most is not the contemplation of nature or life but hunting for venison (“Come, shall we go and kill us venison?”, II.1.21), a pastime traditionally associated with aristocrats, whom he belongs to by birth. What gives him credit is that he means to hunt for food and not for trophies, which may explain his guilt in relation to killing animals in their natural habitat which has only welcomed him and his followers, too. The Duke’s pity for the “poor dappled fools” (II.1.22) turns the hunting into an extremely violent experience, reminiscent of the final attack on Troy: the deer metaphorically become urban dwellers slaughtered by strangers, while their familiar environment turns into a confining trap.

Nevertheless, although the Duke seems to deplore the unfairness of the animals' plight, he and his men do need to survive in the forest. On the other hand, Jaques goes beyond the Duke's somewhat condescending animal empathy and criticizes hunting as a form of usurpation worse than the one experienced by Duke Senior at the hands of his brother Frederick: "The melancholy Jaques grieves at that; / And, in that kind, swears you do more usurp / Than doth your brother that hath banished you." (II.1.26-28) In Jaques' ecocritical view, hunting is a form of sacrificial violence: the courtiers turned foresters are so used to the consumerism at court that they have become murderers of the forest's native animals, of deer in particular (II.1.60-63).

But Shakespeare continuously toys with our expectations. A short scene after Jaques' identification with the chased deer, which has prompted him to become a spokesperson for animal rights, we learn that he has gone missing, possibly having transformed into an animal and thus echoing Orlando's comparison to an ox in the very first scene. The Duke's words when he cannot find Jaques – "I think he be transformed into a beast; / For I can nowhere find him like a man." (II.7.1-2) – suggest that Jaques has 'gone native', having traded the human, shared community life for a life of animalistic solitude, which entails another chase to find him.

Whereas courtiers, used to life in the city, perceive the forest first as a space of exile and then as a hunting ground, the lower social category displays considerably different attitudes. In contrast to the idealized and idyllic version of forest-life presented in the very first scene is Touchstone's rather ambivalent perception of the "shepherd's life" (III.2.11), as it emerges from his conversation with Corin, the wise and traditionally stock pastoral character. Touchstone's description relies on complex sentences, each of which initially uses a positive adjective modifying such a life: "good", "solidary", "private", "in the fields", "spare" (i.e. frugal); however, each following clause counters them, eventually revealing that a shepherd's life is not for everyone and certainly not for him: "it is nought [good]", "a very vile life", "tedious", "it goes much against my stomach."

In an even sharper contrast, Corin paints a much more realistic and work-driven picture of a shepherd's life. Commenting on the difference in manners between court and country, he focuses his short replies on the roughness of handiwork: "we are still handling our ewes, and their fells, you know, are greasy" (III.2.50-51) and the resulting dirty and coarse hands: "Our hands are hard", "often tarred over with the surgery of our sheep" (III.2.56, 59-60). He is the play's most stock pastoral character, a committed shepherd, an honest labourer living off his work and displaying practical wisdom in terms of finances and animal husbandry.

The underlying irony in both Touchstone's and Corin's lines is that, no matter how much the characters try to convince us that courtiers and peasants can cross spatial and social boundaries without needing to adjust to the new environment, their words subvert their actions. Most importantly, another layer of irony is that each of these perceptions of Arden – the Duke's, Jaques', Touchstone's and Corin's – is subjective and different, yet what they all do is show that none is sufficient in itself but only when considered together with the others, providing a 3D-like picture of the forest, which changes depending from the angle one looks at it.

One final perspective on the forest, this time as a magical space, is offered in the end by Jaques de Boys. Oliver and Orlando's brother informs Duke Senior and his group about Duke Frederick's miraculous transformation upon meeting "an old religious man" (V.4.158). Having come "to the skirts of this wild wood" (V.4.157)

in order to have his brother killed, Duke Frederick was miraculously converted and decided to renounce worldly goods and live a secluded life, restoring the throne to the legitimate heir.

In addition to these seemingly conflicting views on country/forest life, perhaps the most significant way in which Shakespeare flouts the conventions of the pastoral in *As You Like It* is through self-reflexivity, which relies on the overlapping of the topological and the stage/theatre spaces. There are three references to “circle” in the play, all of which evoke the more graphic “wooden O” in *Henry V* (Prologue: 14) and the iconic Globe Theatre. The first mention of “circle” appears in Jacques’s tongue-in-cheek explanation of “ducdame”: “’Tis a Greek invocation to call fools into a circle.” (II.5.54-55) While his line can certainly refer to the arrangement of the characters on stage during the scene, it is also a clear hint at the historical, Greek origins of theatre as a form of entertainment taking place in a round amphitheatre. This performance-related circle is echoed in the final scene of the play, in Orlando’s “the circle of this forest” (V.4.34). The deictic adjective “this” urges the audience to interpret the “here” on the stage as an encompassing Arden, in the middle of which characters have found shelter and where he has been nailing poems to trees and carving Rosalind’s name. Here, too, the circle does more than simply gesture to the confines of the forest where the characters are now living; it recalls the shape of the actual Globe Theatre.

The last mention, a more allusive one, appears in Duke Senior’s lines and is more gestural, pointing to the whereabouts of both the actors and the spectators, i.e. to the actual space of the theatre: “This wide and universal theatre / Presents more woeful pageants than the scene / Wherein we play in.” (II.7.137-139) The deictic adjective “this” and the adverbial “wherein” draw attention, on the one hand, to the space where the audience sits or stands while watching the performance, and on the other hand, to the actual performance on stage. Simultaneously, within the space of The Globe, these lines contrast the wider space of the theatre with the inner, more restricted space of the stage or the moment of the play, both of which are suggested by “scene”. Yet within the space of early modern London, it is “the scene” that represents the playhouse, while “the theatre” stands for a larger geopolitical context, which can be the city itself, the country or even the entire world. Furthermore, the Duke’s words can be read as a twofold reminder: for his companions, that they are part of a larger world and that boundaries between court and forest can be crossed, while for the audience, that what they are seeing is the product of a playwright’s imagination and not reality, that there is a boundary between the stage space and the “real” world. As has abundantly been noted in the scholarship, the boundary between the space of the court and the space of the forest mirrors the symbolic boundary between social classes, which is challenged by both the characters on the stage and the audience. While the characters do so by wearing costumes, impersonating aristocratic men and women (who also cross-dress), the members of the audience temporarily break social hierarchies, being equal as spectators watching the same performance. Moreover, Duke Senior’s lines are, in turn, complemented by Jacques’: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players. / They have their exits and their entrances” (II.7.140-42). These lines further expand the space of the stage and of the Globe Theatre to a world scale, casting all the audience as actors of their own lives, and claiming a link between the Globe performance and the world outside of it.

It is also in the magical circle of the Forest of Arden – however temporary a refuge it may be – that the promise of order exists, with Rosalind and Touchstone “jostl[ing] the characters out of their false dreams and illusions” (Cirillo 1971: 21-22); it is still here that Rosalind as a magician, which she herself confesses to (V.2.69), orchestrates the plot towards a happy ending in multiple marriages with her many “if”s (V.2.109-117).

There is a great deal of irony in Rosalind’s character, as Cirillo (1971: 25-26) also notes, most evident in the contrast between her name – always bearing associations with romantic love, even more so here, with its inherent romantic pastoral connotations – and her cynical attitude towards romantic love when training Orlando, starting from the moment when she satirizes him as a traditional lover suffering from love, “sighing every minute and groaning every hour” (III.2.298). That Rosalind’s name is always connected to love is distinctly clear if we consider such other texts as Shakespeare’s source for this very play, Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde: Euphues Golden Legacie*, as well as Edmund Spenser’s Rosalind in *The Shepherde’s Calendar*, or Shakespeare’s own Rosaline, Romeo’s initial love interest in *Romeo and Juliet*. Nonetheless, Rosalind’s own disguise as Ganymede becomes a handy device for self-satire and the subversion of pastoral love conventions when, in act 3, scene 5, Phoebe falls in love with the cross-dressed Rosalind. In a previous scene (III.4), Rosalind’s conversation with Celia about Orlando’s not keeping his promise to return shows her as distressed and giddy, as well as jealous, thus displaying the symptoms of a “by the book” love-sick girl. Later on, in act 4, scene 3, when shown the handkerchief stained with Orlando’s blood, Rosalind acts out of her Ganymede role, fainting like an easily impressionable woman, only to immediately step back in her male persona and pretend she has faked it: “I pray you tell your brother how well I counterfeited” (IV.3.167-168).

Finally, Rosalind’s Epilogue brings irony and self-reflexivity together one last time, concluding the various circles of the play, of the forest and their magic. Stepping out of character(s) and asking the audience for applause, the Rosalind-playing actor brings the audience “into the circle of her magic” (Cirillo 1971: 38), which she does by a perfectly magic invocation – “My way is to *conjure* you” (Epilogue 10, emphasis added) – followed by “charge[s]” to the men and women in the audience. Her final order – “when I make curtsy, bid me farewell” (Epilogue 20-21) – ends not just the play but also the magic she, as a protagonist, has created on stage.

### **3. *The Winter’s Tale* – the pastoral with baroque overtones**

Elizabeth Katherine McIntosh (2021: 8), in her ecological reading of early modern pastorals, starts from the assumption that even the most apparently serene settings contain a seed of darkness, the shadow of death or the threat of an imminent cataclysm. She justifies this hypothesis with the observation that England in the late sixteenth century was already fighting with radical weather changes, disasters such as severe floods and epidemics, with dire economic consequences that went from bad harvests to the massive depopulation of entire regions. Therefore, McIntosh (2021: 9) concludes, “pastoral prefaces disaster, and is the place where it happens, offering a framework within which inscrutable natural events, too sizeable and systemic for easy comprehension, can be interpreted”.

Whether the seed of disaster is topical in the early modern pastoral due to climatic and socio-economic changes or is in fact a more generalizable feature of the genre is a debate yet to be settled. Suffice it to say that such ambivalence can be traced even in the most prototypical visual representation of the pastoral setting, Nicolas Poussin's 1637 *Et in Arcadia ego*. Faithful more to the geographical reality of Arcadia, a barren region in Greece, than to the expectations of bounty to which the pastoral commonly relates, the artist painted a rocky mountainous background in greyish shades. The foreground is similarly ambivalent and paradoxical, as the central piece is a tomb; therefore, the emphasis on the theme of death and transience forces upon viewers the realization that even the most blissful moment or locus contains the warning of loss, dissolution and mortality. Even if there are no explicit depictions of death, such as the skull, *Et in Arcadia ego* has all the necessary ingredients of a baroque composition.

Shakespeare's pastorals can be said to go in the same direction of ambivalence, the most obvious example being the gloomy picture projected by Titania, Queen of the fairies, in the middle of the pastoral revelry and retreat provided by the magic forest of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Youth, love, unspoiled nature and happiness are overshadowed by the disaster which seems to have been looming large in the minds of the characters: "contagious fogs", overflowed rivers, muddy fields, empty pens and barns, disease, frosts in the summer, unhealthy weather, disease in humans and animals (Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II.1.90-110).

Written about ten years after *As You Like It*, *The Winter's Tale* is less obviously baroque than Poussin's Arcadia and less disquieting than the evocation of floods that put a significant dent in the spirits of those inhabiting or seeking refuge in the forest near Athens. However, as Adrian Papahagi (2020: 185) notices, if the game of shadows was perfected by Shakespeare in the ballet of light and darkness displayed by *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale* goes subtly in the same direction when, despite the general revelry at the end of the play, a certain melancholy chord is struck. Time seems to be triumphant after reconciliation and regeneration have been secured, but Mamilus, the innocent boy, is still dead, Hermione, brought back to life, is wrinkled, Antigonus cannot return from the belly of the bear which chased him, and the two kings cannot recuperate the youthful happiness they have been yearning for since Act 1. Death is abstract, contained as it is and not presented on the stage (neither Mamilus nor Antigonus die in the viewers' presence), which brings the play close to the spirit of Poussin's painting, where, again, no overt reference to death was made, as elsewhere in baroque art. But the *memento mori* motif is chilling enough.

The loss of youth and innocence is treated in a similar manner. (It should be briefly observed here that all quotes from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, including the ones in the article title (IV.1.1640, 1641) are from *Shakespeare's Romances and Poems*, edited by David Bevington (2006).) In Act 1, Polixenes delivers the most literally pastoral lines when confessing his nostalgia for a time that had two incontestable qualities. On the one hand, it offered him the security and happiness that only childhood could secure:

We were, fair queen, / Two lads that thought there was no more behind / But such a day to-morrow as to-day, / And to be boy eternal. (I.2.126-29)

On the other hand, it had him on good terms with Leontes, in an idyllic décor that could only enhance his sense of well-being:

We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' the sun, / And bleat the one at the other:  
what we changed / Was innocence for innocence; we knew not / The doctrine of ill-  
doing, nor dream'd / That any did. (I.2.132-35)

It must be noted that this indirect pastoral reference, mediated through Polixenes' speech, appears early in the play, long before the pastoral setting unfolds itself in the second part, after the transfer of the action both to a different space and to a different time. Ironically, the place where the first pastoral promise is conveyed (by Polixenes) but not delivered and materialised, is Sicilia, Leontes' kingdom, the pastoral setting par excellence, inherited from the ancient tradition of Theocritus. Shakespeare plays with the pastoral conventions not only by reversing the quality of the Sicilian setting (and making it anti-pastoral), but also by reversing the setting itself as borrowed from his sources. As we know, Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, which served as the main inspiration for the plot of the late romance, features Bohemia as the first setting, in which jealousy, suffering and gloom prevail, and, faithful to Theocritus, allows Sicilia to be the place where the pastoral cures the wounds and fixes the wrongs.

Shakespeare continues to play with the pastoral convention, alternating a quasi-mimetic rendition of classical pastoral elements with details that counterbalance or undermine the intention and meaning of the pastoral. The contrast that is commonly emphasised in the pastoral, between city and country, or between court and country, is nuanced in *The Winter's Tale*. While the two settings of the play are geographically separate (set apart by a sea and a desert country by the sea, inhabited by a bear), the transition from Sicilia to Bohemia is done smoothly, with the appearance of the shepherds in Act 3, who announce the turning point of the plot. The mature Sicilians' death enables a return to the "twinn'd lambs", frisking in the sun, now embodied by the baby foundling, a balance, rather than a contrast, between two ages, adulthood and childhood, corresponding symbolically to two seasons, autumn and spring. The Old Shepherd summarises this smooth transition thus, when he finds the baby and hears the Clown's tale about mariners drowning and bears dining at gentlemen:

Heavy matters! Heavy matters! but look thee here, / boy. Now bless thyself: thou  
mettest with things / dying, I with things newborn. (III.3.1606-8)

But here, in Bohemia turned Arcadia, where the pastoral idealization is expected to work its wonders, the lost innocence of youth, regarded as the Golden Age, is not evoked nostalgically. As soon as the décor changes and the pastoral is installed, the Old Shepherd's musings about the troubles of the young age provide an antithesis with Polixenes' nostalgic memories of blissful boyhood:

I would there were no age between sixteen and / three-and-twenty, or that youth  
would sleep out the / rest; for there is nothing in the between but / getting wenches  
with child, wronging the ancientry, / stealing, fighting (III.3.1553-7)

By all means, Bohemia is not what it seems. Sicilia was not the pastoral promised by its name; Bohemia, the promised land for the exiles, also comes short of its reputation.

The shepherds in *The Winter's Tale* are also dissimilar to the stock characters in conventional pastorals. According to tradition, herdsmen necessarily embody an

allegory – they stand, through their occupation, for a lost life in harmony with nature, which man had already lost by the time Theocritus and Vergil wrote their poems, *Idylls* and *The Eclogues* respectively. Paraphrasing Paul Alpers and Ken Hiltner, mentioned above, we may argue that shepherds in the generic pastoral are representative of, or gesture at, something abstract, which has little to do with individual characters. In *As You Like It*, this function gains some complexity by the fact that the characters interpret a role – they are courtiers representing themselves as sylvestrian men and women. A culmination is reached in *The Winter's Tale*, where the shepherds are more individualised than anywhere else in the pastoral tradition. They are differentiated by age (there are old and young peasants), but, most importantly, they are not portrayed in the romanticised and artificial manner which is common to the pastoral genre. As rustics, they speak in prose, a stylistic characteristic which Shakespeare reserves to secondary characters, commoners and simpletons. One of the Bohemian shepherds is given the comic role of the play, as the Clown. Even if, by the end, they fraternise with royals, when they travel to Sicilia as significant, even providential, instruments in the happy family reconciliation (and the Clown feels entitled to call Prince Florizel brother), they are a far cry from the unrealistic, graceful and elegant shepherds' figures featured in pastorals. There is certainly a connection between this specificity of the shepherds in *The Winter's Tale* and the fact that Shakespeare chooses to make them inhabitants of Bohemia. Far from being meaningless as some critics tend to believe, the name of this second space of the romance is indelibly connected to the shepherd's lifestyle. Signifying freedom, unconventionalism and adventure, Bohemianism is also synonymous with simple living, frugality and a nomadic existence. The two sets of features match both the conventional characterization of pastoral living and a more realistic portrayal of agrarian rhythms and lifestyles.

The role of the shepherds in *The Winter's Tale* is further complicated by the fact that they become instruments in the unfolding of the romance. Unlike *As You Like It*, where the central and singular mythological character is the magician who brings the story to a(n apparently miraculous) happy ending, or the director who stages and orchestrates the action and instructs all other characters about their function and position, this role is multiplied in Shakespeare's late romance. Both pastoral and providence work through the Bohemian rustics – a group which includes Autolycus, who is and, at the same time, is not a pastoral character – who organise the sheep-shearing feast, designate Perdita as mythical Flora, and contribute to her recognition as princess, thus demonstrating her bridal worth to the sceptical Polixenes and returning her to her grieving father.

If Rosalind-Ganymede is the character who makes a difference in the pastoral setting of the Forest of Arden, Flora-Perdita is doubled by a variety of other characters in the effort to bring the pastoral plan to fruition in Bohemia: to secure bliss and happiness, to make youth, as the Golden Age, victorious, to bring harmony and peace in nature, but also in the human nature. Apart from the shepherds, the balance is achieved with the help of the two other females of the play, Hermione and Paulina. It is obvious that the final happiness cannot be reached before mother and daughter are reunited, as is the fact that the heroines are counterparts of each other. It is also obvious that Paulina is an important instrument, not only in rescuing the heroines, mother and daughter, from Leontes' rage, but also in making sure reconciliation will eventually take place (she constantly fuels the king's guilt and makes sure his mourning does not end until the sixteen years have passed and the truth can be revealed, thus preventing him from

taking a new wife and creating a new family, as he wants to do in Greene's *Pandosto*). At the same time, though, Hermione and Paulina have much in common with the allegorical female figure in Poussin's *Et in Arcadia ego*. The queen and Paulina, who invites everybody in the end to partake in an artistic as well as mystic experience, encourage readers and viewers of the play to meditate about the relationship between nature and art. Nature, in the pastoral, we have seen so far, is not important in itself, but for what it gestures at. In this case, the very nature of nature, not only of art, is being brought under scrutiny, when Paulina urges the visitors of her "gallery" to see with their own eyes that art is more permanent than nature: "But here it is: prepare / To see the life as lively mock'd as ever" (V.3.3307-8) and Leontes agrees, exclaiming in wonder at the sight of the breathing statue: "Her natural posture!" (V.3.3315). While the claim is that art prevails over nature, the truth is revealed to be the opposite, when the statue, apparently brought to life by magic or artistic talent, turns out to be the woman in flesh and blood.

#### 4. If conclusions be

What we have tried to show in this paper is how Shakespeare goes beyond the pastoral tradition, always playing with its conventions, using nature as a "gestural strategy" (Hiltner 2011: 25), adding layers of irony and self-reflexivity. The crossing of topological borders – be they in the same country (from court to the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*), or in a wider geopolitical context (from Sicilia to Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale*) – enables characters to transgress social borders and to connect differently, more freely than in their initial circumstances, while also allowing for criticism of the pastoral romance, idealized love and upper class customs. At the same time, actors occasionally draw attention linguistically to the spaces re-created on stage, including in these magical spaces the socially diverse audience.

In both plays, Shakespeare connects the pastoral setting with a certain nostalgia for a golden age, a historical time long past or the lost innocence of youth, but their positive implications are, in fact, only superficial. On the one hand, in *As You Like It*, the lifestyle of Duke Senior and his followers who, much like Robin Hood, resort to hunting as a way of survival, contrasts sharply with the fact that deer are victims of sacrificial violence in their own familiar habitats. On the other hand, in *The Winter's Tale*, the playful and blissful boyhood memories of the two kings are set off against the Old Shepherd's view of restless, troubled youthfulness. Employing these subtle references or commentaries, Shakespeare complicates the pastoral plot and refurbishes the pastoral setting, offering readers and viewers an embedded experience, which merges nature, the "real" and the not-so-real world and the stage.

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