

Dark Matter: Shakespeare's foul dens and forests

The forest in literature has a long humanist history. It dates from classical Greek and Roman writers to Hellenistic/Jewish philosophers and is reiterated through subsequent Christian texts and allegories.¹ The space of the forest as a setting was a popular place on the Elizabethan stage. The anonymous *Mucedorus*, in which the forest is central to the drama, was played frequently during the 1590s and revised in 1610; there are numerous references to 'trees' in the accounts for the Office of the Revels; and the tree or collection of trees often appears in plays that do not demand such scenic props.² Many of the allusions in Shakespeare's forests are of course Ovidian, and particularly refer to Books IV and VI of his *Metamorphoses* and the tales of Pyramus and Thisbe and Tereus and Philomel.³ We might also understand the forest as a

¹ The forest's history is long and complex and my primary concern here is with Shakespeare's representational use of such a space within the context of early modern discourses that are not necessarily part of a classical humanist tradition. Much important work has been done on the influence of Virgil and Ovid as well as the early modern European tradition including Tasso, Ariosto, Dante, and Ronsard, but recent work on Shakespeare's forests is surprisingly sparse: Anne Barton is completing a book-length project on Shakespeare's forests, and alongside Marienstras's work there is Jeanne Roberts who has largely focused on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, including an article, 'Falstaff in Windsor Forest: Villain or Victim', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.1 (Winter, 1975), 8-15, in which she notices the 'ominous' nature of the forest, but goes on to suggest that Windsor Forest is 'more of a park than a forest – a fitting place to meditate between the town and the wild woods', (p. 10). She has also addressed the forest through the psycho-sexual in *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska press, 1991). Michael Pincombe's essay 'Classical and Contemporary Sources of the "Gloomy woods" of *Titus Andronicus*: Ovid, Seneca, Spenser' in *Shakespearean Continuities: Essays in Honour of E. J. A. Honigman*, ed. John Batchelor, Tom Cain and Claire Lamont (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 40-55, explores the influence of Seneca, rather than Ovid, in the tragedy of Titus's woods. Robert Watson has most recently addressed the wood in *As You Like It in Back to Nature, the Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 77-107. E. Thompson Shields Jr identifies the forest as central to representations of exploration and ideas of wilderness in his essay 'Imagining the Forest: Longleaf Pine Eco-Systems in Spanish and English Writings of the South East, 1542-1709' in *Early Modern Ecocriticism: From the Florentine Codex to Shakespeare*, ed. Ivo Kamps and Karen Raber (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 251-268. In the same collection, Todd Andrew Borlik explores a complex emotional network of empathy and identity as it is expressed through the wooded landscape in his piece, 'Mute Timber: Fiscal Forestry and Environmental Stichomythia in the *Old Arcadia*', pp. 33-54.

² Richard Marienstras observes that *Mucedorus* uses the forest as a place in which to play out the more conventional binaries of the wild and the civilised. This, he suggests, is part of a medieval legacy that used the forest as a 'natural setting' for the 'chivalric or initiatory adventures, the place per excellence opposed to the civilised, to reason and to humanity and which at the same time, by virtue of the trials to which it subjects those who venture into it, makes it possible to rediscover, in a regenerated and superior form, that from which it has set them apart', *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 15. There is very little material available in terms of reconstructing stage properties but G. F. Reynolds, "'Trees" on the stage of Shakespeare', *Modern Philology* Vol. 5 No. 2., (Oct., 1907), pp. 153-168 examines a number of Elizabethan plays in the light of their arboreal props.

³ In Book VI, of Golding's translation of *Metamorphoses*, Philomel's beauty is compared to the fairies, who 'haunt' 'the pleasant woods and water springs'; 'yet in beautie far more riche' she delights the eye and desire of Tereus (VI, 579). Bent on his violent lust, Tereus takes her to 'woods forgowen', the 'shadie woods' (VI, 664, 807), and after the terrible deed, Philomel tells her assailant: 'If thou keepe me still / As prisoner in these woods, my voyce the verie woods shall fill, / And make the stones to understand' (VI, 698-8), XV Books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, translated by Arthur Golding (London: Willyam Seres, 1567).

version of the pastoral, as exemplified in *Mucedorus*, as a place that supports the exploration of antithesis (the savage and the civilised), and the juxtaposition of containment and imagination.⁴ Although Shakespeare's forests are much indebted to this tradition and its translation by other contemporary Elizabethan writers, including Spenser, this essay argues that there is something more parochial, more urgent, at work in his forests on stage. Such parochialism draws us back to how Elizabethan forests were being used, as well as abused, and how, importantly for this study, the forest stood in relation to the rest of the social community. The forest is not a comprehensive landscape; rather, it emerges as a habitat for multiple voices, which occupy a transitional space – literally and metaphorically – between the past and the future. This space is haunted by the forest's history of danger, punishment and pleasure.⁵ The following argument maintains that, contrary to popular expectations, the Elizabethan forest is defined not as a physically bounded space, but as a discursive construct, a linguistic practice that was subject to shifting civil and legal pressures. An examination of an influential Elizabethan treatise on the forest suggests that the concern is primarily with the use of and behaviour within the forest, rather than its organic matter. Contrary to our expectations of the literary or dramatic forest, Shakespeare's shady landscapes are not dependent on their allegorical precedents but belong equally to an emerging, and at times insistent, Elizabethan preoccupation with language: the language of orientation, of order, of emotion and of possession. The forest space trials a moral economy that will, as we move into the seventeenth century, become much more defined as a social landscape.⁶ For the Elizabethans,

⁴ Shakespeare's *As You Like It* comes closest to using the forest space within a pastoral context, or, at least, within the ideological terms that the pastoral represents. A. Stuart Daley reminds us, however, that most of the play actually takes place on grazed pasture land and that the woody scenes are few and in relation to the Duke's seclusion. A. Stuart Daley, 'Where are the Woods In *As You Like It*?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vo. 34, No. 2, (Summer 1983), pp. 172-80.

⁵ Robert Pogue Harrison in *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), explores the social and philosophical relations between deforestation and institutional order. Harrison describes a primal antipathy between the civilised and forested world, which he sees as an expression of man's 'traumatised' relations with nature. p. 2. Harrison's book traces much of the forest through myth, and how humans have created and sustained their urban and rural areas in response to inherited cultural stories.

⁶ As we move into the seventeenth century trees and forests become symbols of nostalgia as well as aspiration. The metaphysical poets often draw on the tree as a way of exploring the relationship between man and his material world: Henry Vaughan, in 'The Book' (1646), for example, follows the tree through its timber to the leaves of a book, through the godly nature of creation and renewal to find faith in nature, and nature in faith; Michael Drayton, on the other hand, travels the country in 'Poly-Olbion' (1612) where he looks plaintively at a landscape that has lost the beauty and resources of so much woodland. Seeing both hunger and deforestation, Drayton's landscape speaks:

Who, when nor Sea nor Land for him sufficient were,
 With his deuouring teeth his wretched flesh did teare.
 This did you for one Tree: but of whole Forrests they
 That in these impious times haue been the vile decay
 (Whom I may iustlie call their Countries deadly foes)
 Gainst them you moue no Power, their spoyle vnpunisht goes.
 How manie griued soules in future time shall starue,
 For that which they haue rapt their beastlie lust to serue! (The Seventh Song), Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London: Humphrey Lowes, 1612), p. 107.

however, the forest was a place of exploration that stood in conversation with the social world but also in conflict with it.

In 1598 John Manwood published a book entitled *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest*. Manwood was a legal writer, an M. P. for Sandwich, a gamekeeper for Waltham forest and a justice for New Forest. Manwood's book was the first major book on the subject, although it was indebted to two widely circulated inns of courts readings which had preceded it.⁷ In an exposition to the reader, Manwood declares that not only does such a treatise contribute to the 'common good' but that it is necessary because the forests are so neglected and trespassed and that the laws 'are grown clean out of knowledge ... partly, for want of use, and partly by reason that there is very little or nothing extant of it in any treatise by it self.'⁸ Manwood sets out to redress this in his re-presentation of the forest laws and those who regulate them. He explains their place as the privilege of the king, their role in maintaining a landscape for hunting that is free from poaching or encroachment, and their symbolic value as demarcating a space that is distinct from common law and supported by custom. Manwood dedicates his book to Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, Knight of the Garter and, among other things, chief justice of the queen's forest south of the Trent. For Manwood the forests are abused in ignorance and stupidity and we are 'as well to revive in memory these laws being so ancient and learned prerogative laws, as also to satisfy the fond opinions and blind conceits that such unlearned men do hold'.⁹ Manwood's *Treatise* is a unique record not so much of the landscape of the forest but of the attitudes it absorbs and the emotions it sustains. He declares the space to be both discrete and ideal, since it represents and contains a unique order that works on the basis of pleasure (the king's hunting) punishment (the, often savage, penalties for breaking those laws), hierarchy (the system of justice that recognises authority only in the shape of the monarch or nobleman), and reward (in the resurrection of 'history' as the path to 'merry', England).¹⁰ As Manwood explores the landscape of the king's hunting, of his 'pleasure and delight', he reveals a much darker side to the maintenance of that pleasure, a darkness that emerges through pain, punishment, animal mutilation and an uncompromising 'justice' system based on the whim of a single authority.¹¹ Whatever crime is committed the perpetrator is turned over to the king, who deals with him or her at his will:

⁷ These were by Richard Tresketh and George Treherne, which, as Baker says in his entry on Manwood for the DNB, are 'occasionally cited' by Manwood.

⁸ John Manwood, *A Treatise and Discourse of the Lawes of the Forrest* (London: Thomas Wright and Bonham Norton, 1598), sig.*3r-v.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ In Manwood's earlier edition, which was printed for private circulation, he is much more explicit about the importance of the history of these laws. Beginning with Canute he repeatedly celebrates the laws of the forest as 'very ancient things': 'Which Forests the Kings and Princes of the realm have always maintained and preferred (with divers Privileges and Laws appertaining to the same,) for places of pleasure and delight in their recreation', John Manwood, *A Briefe Collection of the Lawes of the Forest* (London, 1592), sig. 2.

¹¹ This darker side to the forest emerges, for the most part, in Manwood's description of how forest justice systems should be implemented. The penalties for poaching are hard – dogs can have their paws cut off and men and women who commit any crimes in breach of forest law (including the harming of animals, trespassing, or cutting of timber) will be punished either by 'Imprisonment, Fine or Ransom', (p. 37). But Manwood takes pains to describe those who are exempt from the potentially draconian laws; he describes the elderly ('persons that are of the age of 70 years and upwards'), the infirm, 'being either lame, sickly, or else blind' as not compelled to attend the forest courts, and 'Archbishops,

There is no certain fine set down for the same by the Laws of the Forest, but only that the same fine is arbitrable at the will and pleasure of the king.¹²

It is with this arbitrariness, as well as ambiguity that this essay is concerned and the exclusive space that the forest provides for the co-existence of punishment and pleasure, beauty and horror. Although Shakespeare writes at least four plays in which the forest occupies a significant space, it is the woods of *Titus Andronicus* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that are most compelling in their exploration of Elizabethan anxieties.¹³ Despite their different generic resolutions, *Titus Andronicus* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* bring their action to a forest in which there is no certainty, moral, social or structural, and tragedy is always nearer than harmony.¹⁴ Invested in questions of authority and order, predicated on theories of pleasure, and haunted by images of abuse and punishment Manwood adumbrates a localised vision of Shakespeare's dramatic landscape. Although there is no doubt as to the classical influences in Shakespeare's forests there is also a more parochial forest in place. As Manwood's text attempts to authorise the Elizabethan forest, so Shakespeare's plays begin to explore it.

When, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594-6), the lovers return from their night amidst fairies and darkness in 'the wood, a league without the town' (I.i.165), Demetrius declares that 'These things seem small and undistinguishable, / Like far-off mountains turnèd into clouds' (IV.i.186-187) and Hermia muses: 'Methinks I see these things with a parted eye / When everything seems double' (IV.i.188-189).¹⁵ Where they have been and what they have seen fades and divides as though, in trauma or in trance, it resists remembering. The wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, like the forest in *Titus Andronicus*, is a space for the play's action to retire into horror or fantasy: 'double', 'dreadful', 'desert', 'ruthless', 'shadowy', 'indistinguishable' and 'green', this natural expanse secludes lovers and rapists, murderers and fairies. But the word 'forest' is an ambiguous one, referring to both a physical and a legal space – which were frequently neither the same size nor aspect. The forest could encompass marsh, bog, fen, pasture, cultivated and uncultivated land, as well as patches of woodland. Although primarily a Renaissance term, appearing, in English, in the

Bishops, Abbots, Priors, Earls and Barons' are allowed not to appear in person 'but by their attorney', p. 498, 499.

¹² P. 47, cf. p. 125-6.

¹³ These are *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. Although there are no specific scenes set in a wood in *Macbeth*, Burnham wood has a very particular role both symbolically and literally.

¹⁴ I have chosen not to deal with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, partly because Roberts has conducted a fine study and partly because I am particularly interested in Shakespeare's exploitation of the caprice of the forest and how the space provides a refuge for abuse as much as pleasure. In *The Merry Wives* the forest is defined more by images of romance than by tragedy. I am dealing with the plays, not in the order in which they were written, but starting with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* so as to establish from the outset how the place of the forest emerges, even in comedy, through punishment and anxiety.

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Stanley Wells (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). All references, unless otherwise stated, are to this edition. Despite the ecological and political differences, Shakespeare uses the words *wood* and *forest* interchangeably. The term 'wood', according to the *OED*, applies to 'a collection of trees' larger than a grove but smaller than a forest. The word emerges earlier than the term 'forest', sometime around the eleventh century, and seems to morph out of Old English and German.

fourteenth century to describe a tract of land covered in trees and undergrowth, the term derives from a synthesis of the Old French and Mediaeval Latin words for ‘outside’ (*forest-em*) or ‘out of doors’ (*forīs*).¹⁶ According to the *Treatise*, however, what defined the forest was its deer, its ownership, and, most significantly, its legal status and social ideology:

A Forest is a certain territory of woody grounds and fruitful pastures, privileged for wild beasts and fowls of forest, chase and warren, to rest and abide in, in the safe protection of the king, for his principle delight and pleasure, which territory of ground, so privileged, is meered and bounded, with unremovable marks, meers, and boundaries, either known by master of record, or else by prescription: And also replenished with wild beasts of venery or chase, and with great coverts of vert, for the succour of the said wild beasts, to have their abode in: for the preservation and continuance of which said place, together with the vert and venison, there are certain particular laws, privileges and officers, belonging to the same, meet for that purpose, that are only proper unto the forest, and not to any other place.¹⁷

As Manwood seeks definition for the forest, so he also seeks containment, betraying a profound anxiety as to the propriety of this space. For Manwood, certain aspects of the forest are absolute and these relate almost entirely to who owns it and where the boundaries lie. As well as its ownership and borders, the forest must contain particular animals – hart, hind, hare, boar and wolf – to be defined as such.¹⁸ As a forest is a ‘privileged’ area of land, distinct from ‘any other place’, in which deer are kept as the property of the king or member of the nobility, the laws governing these areas of land often extended way beyond the wooded tracts of land where the deer lived to where they roamed. Manwood’s book repeatedly emphasises the order of the forest; that it belongs to the king (or a nobleman), that it is defined by its animals for hunting, that it is subject to particular laws and that its scope is mapped with ‘unremovable marks’ according to the ranging capacity of its beasts. The boundaries exist, as they are ‘either known by master of record, or else by prescription’. Like the term ‘privilege’, Manwood uses ‘prescription’ in its legal context, meaning a title or right acquired through uninterrupted use or possession. The forest belongs to those who use it, ‘possess’ it and understand it. The forest is entirely self-reflexive; as discrete from the rest of the realm and accountable only to the king’s will, the forest is a place of fantasy, and, for Manwood, much of his fantasy is embedded in a sense of England’s history.¹⁹ Yet according to Oliver Rackham’s analysis of the forests (since parts of land were designated as such by William the Conqueror), Manwood’s text is misleading.²⁰ For Rackham, Manwood’s text is a vision of ‘merry England’ which

¹⁶ See the *OED*.

¹⁷ John Manwood, *A Treatise of the Laws of the Forest*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁸ ‘And therefore a forest is not a privileged place, generally for all manner of wild beasts, nor for all manner of fowls, but only those that are of the forest, chase and warren. The wild beasts of the forest are five and no more, that is to say, the hart, the hynde, the hare, the boar and the wolf.’, *Laws of the Forest*, pp. 43-4.

¹⁹ In the preface to the privately circulated 1592 edition, Manwood explains how the laws of the forest were affected and emended under the various kings since Canute in 1016. His emphasis is on how the history of forest law despite inflicting hardship and distress on the forest inhabitants has often been ‘gracious and merciful’ at the hands of the ‘noble princes’ of the realm. He looks to Elizabeth in this tradition, knowing, he says that ‘her clemency in the execution of those laws is much more greater than the favour & clemency of the laws themselves’.

²⁰ Rackham accuses Manwood of misrepresenting the amount of deforested land and he attributes much of the misinformation around deforestation to the misunderstood discrepancies between the legal and the physical forest. Given that to a great extent the legal space of the forest has been taken to represent

reflects a nostalgic attempt to represent a landscape of feudal order and customary relations. But this need to authorise the forest, as well as define it, exposes a changing relationship between the organic and symbolic worlds. The anxiety expressed in Manwood's *Treatise* suggests a shift in the ways in which the landscape functions in relation to the social worlds. Again and again, Manwood tries to address the organic space through the language of possession and terms like 'wild', 'privileged', 'law' and 'sacred' are constantly being traded over the boundaries between the forest and the city.

Manwood's authorisation of the forest as a legal space through terms that reflect both the spatial and the social exposes a landscape that appears to threaten as well as reflect its community. More prescient than the imagined forests of myth and metamorphoses, the Elizabethan forest comes to occupy a transitional place in the changing moral economy of the natural world. When, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Egeus begs 'the ancient privilege of Athens' (1.1.41) over Hermia, he does so for the recognition that 'As she is mine, I may dispose of her' (1.1.41). This 'privilege' is a property right, which in Egeus's understanding of Athenian law, allows him to regulate the body of his daughter. However, for Manwood, the term is often used in conjunction with 'sanctuary', which, as Richard Marienstras observes, alludes to the right of asylum.²¹ Like the wood itself Hermia becomes caught up in competing notions of liberty and constraint; in Athenian terms her father's response declares her to be condemned by paternal law, and yet in terms of the wood into which she will enter, to be privileged is to be protected by law. In recognition of the different legal spaces, Manwood writes:

... the laws of the forest, the reason and punishment, the pardon, or absolution of offenders, whether the same be pecuniary or corporeal, they are differing from other judgements of the laws of the Realm, and are subject unto the judgements of the king, to determine at his will and pleasure... Reason, Punishment, and Pardon shall not be tied to the order of the Common Law of this Realm, but unto the voluntary appointment of the prince; so that the same which by this law in that behalf shall be appointed or determined, may not be accounted or called absolute justice or law, but justice or law according to the laws of the forest.²²

Whilst 'absolute justice or law' is statutory, the laws of the forest are subject to the 'will and pleasure' of the king.²³ The idea of a single figure of authority regulating and governing the forest space, as distinct from the rest of the realm, presents the forest as an alternative, yet reflective, model of the anthropocentric world. To determine 'Reason', dispense 'Punishment' and grant 'Pardon' within the forest is to allow it to exist as the shadow of the law, as experiential rather than essential. This practise is not, Manwood reminds us, 'absolute justice or law, but justice or law according to the forest.' His caveat makes the forest a rather remarkable place, for it is

the physical space of the forest the figures have been vastly misrepresented. 'The total area of physical Forest would have been nearly a million acres, about 3% of England, but the legal are of Forest Jurisdiction – royal and private – covered at least a third of the country', *Ancient Woodland, its History, Vegetation and uses in England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), p. 179.

²¹ Marienstras notes that this right of asylum extended 'to churches, essentially, and a few sanctuaries.... The right was limited by Henry VIII but was not abolished until 1623, by James I', *New Perspectives*, p. 20.

²² Manwood, *The Laws of the Forest*, pp. 486-7.

²³ Forest law is actually created under statute, despite its apparent fluidity, and is written down in 'a book remaining in the exchequer, called Liber Rubrus', Manwood, p. 486.

not fixed; or rather what goes on in the forest is not subject to fixed principles. Only a recognised figure of authority can determine what the ethical and social codes of the forest are, and until they do so the forest is entirely independent of the community it borders. Manwood betrays a urgent need to demarcate this space; to express the separation if not necessarily to understand it.

Just after the lovers make their pact to escape into ‘the wood, a league without the town’ (1.1.162), where ‘the sharp Athenian law / Cannot pursue us’ (1.1.165), we become aware of the wood’s pre-history: this place is not strange to the couples, since not only have Helena and Hermia spent time there together, but Lysander remembers the wood:

Where I did meet thee once with Helena
To do observance to a morn of May. (1.1.166-167)

The context of May morning links the lovers to the wood under the auspices of festival and misrule, which in its pageantry and custom often supports the licensed imagination. The wood in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is frequently given the role of the pastoral or festive escapism; C.L. Barber, in his famous exposition of comedy and custom, writes:

The woods are established as a region of metamorphosis, where in liquid moonlight or glimmering starlight, things can change, merge, melt into each other. Metamorphosis expresses both what love sees and what it seeks to do.²⁴

The wood thus becomes a ‘literary’ forest, a conventional place of projected perception, created by the imagination but endorsed by social fantasy; any materiality that the woods may represent is only necessary in support of the lovers’ subjective journey. Although the wood must begin as a region, a place, which requires the lovers to make a journey, it is sustained by the transcendental qualities of that journey. Yet what seems to support Barber’s construction of change is not the woods themselves but perception, and a ‘glimmering’ half-light in which anything can happen. Barber’s description presupposes that, in order for metamorphosis to occur, the woods do not occupy or support any organic, or at least consistent, reality. If the woods generate change then they are also constantly changing. Yet for Marienstras even when the forest is organic it is also emotional:

In Shakespeare, despite the role played by the forest in *Titus Andronicus*, the important initiatory space is located within man himself (*Hamlet*) or else it is abstract, topographically ill-defined even if outside the city (*King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*).²⁵

Here the wood is a refuge from civil institutions but only as a place for ‘licence’ rather than destruction. It provides temporary relief from an order to which we must

²⁴ C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 133.

²⁵ Marinestras continues: ‘The woods in which the Greek lovers of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* get lost, or the Forest of Arden, are only metaphorical places of wildness: what is discovered there is a kind of amorous licence, an ‘animality’ which is a property of civilised man and a constant part of his nature. As for the outlaws in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *As you Like It* or *Cymbeline*, they do not find it easy to make their pastoral disguises pass unnoticed. These woods are rather places for individual discoveries, romantic refuges from the corruption of the Court or the force of the mighty. In other words, the tradition of the forest as a refuge is maintained’, *New Perspectives*, p. 15.

return. In this way the forest endorses an apparently comprehensive notion of ‘refuge’ (‘amorous licence’, ‘animality’, discovery or romance) because it remains a part of man’s nature rather than in opposition to it.²⁶ Yet as Manwood seeks to define the forest through its legal status and social bonds, so he also tries to separate the forest from the rest of the community and, indeed, the commonwealth. The Elizabethan forest is not a refuge from the community but a reflection of it; an alternative model of order fraught with the anxiety of status, boundaries, order and responsibility.

Although the wood in *Dream* appears to be an escape from the ‘sharp Athenian law’, soft with ‘faint primrose beds’ and sympathetic to the emotions of youth in Puck’s famous description of the bank on which he will lull Titania into ‘hateful fantasies’, the natural fabric becomes enmeshed in something much more sinister:²⁷

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxslips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet muskroses and with eglantine.
There sleeps Titania some time of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances of delight.
And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in.
And with the juice of this I’ll streak her eyes
And make her full of hateful fantasies. (2.1.249-258)

The soporific landscape with which Puck begins turns on the presence of the snake, to induce Titania into her hateful, and corrupted, passion. The snake that creeps amidst gentle beauty and the fairy that wraps itself in the shining skin draws this nature into the fragile paradise of a potential hell. This wood, like the nature of Puck’s vision, holds the vulnerable to ransom. When Demetrius and Helena enter the wood and find each other, the fabric of the place releases the violence of their determination: Demetrius to reject Helena at all costs, and Helena to subject herself to Demetrius at all costs. Having told Helena to ‘Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit; / For I am sick when I do look on thee’ (2.1.211-212), he goes on:

You do impeach your modesty too much,
To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;
To trust the opportunity of night
And the ill counsel of a desert place
With the rich worth of your virginity (2.1.214-219)

Its distance from the city, ‘the opportunity of night’ and the ‘ill counsel of a desert place’ makes the wood, in collaboration with Demetrius’s hatred, a profoundly hostile environment. It is, however, the idea of isolation that makes the wood so threatening. Demetrius tells Helena of her vulnerability; she is with a man who loathes her in a

²⁶ See quote above.

²⁷ Hermia confides to Helena: ‘And in the wood, where often you and I / Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie / Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet, / Here my Lysander and myself shall meet’. (1.1.214-217)

place that will not protect her. What becomes ambiguous, however, is to what extent the seclusion and darkness of the wood make it a passive bystander in human cruelty or an active collaborator in both violence and hatred. Shakespeare's use of the wood seems to suggest that it moves, often seamlessly, between the two. Dramatic records show that trees, and woods, however they were suggested, were used to invoke solitude and isolation. This isolation was, more often than not, portentous. G. F. Reynolds explains that brutality lurks in:

... the wood scenes of Elizabethan drama, and ... the scenes supposed to be located in solitary and desert places. In many cases these will coincide – the wood scenes are usually represented as solitary, the solitary scene usually mentions woods. One of the principal characteristics of the Forest of Arden, for instance, is its savagery and solitude.²⁸

Reynolds' reference to the Forest of Arden as a place of savagery and solitude is not unusual: although an *idea* of the place has predominantly emerged through a Romantic perspective, A. Stuart Daley reminds us that *As You Like It* is dominated by the pastoral, and that sheep husbandry was an extensive Tudor business and, as such, the Elizabethans would have recognised the different landscapes for grazing and hunting.²⁹ The Forest of Arden, however, when it appears, only does so in association with Duke Senior, his isolation and concern:

Once we distinguish between these two Arden settings, we notice what must be a meaningful set of correspondences or parallels between their constituent elements. One features dark, perilous woods, hunters, native deer (and other, still more emblematic beasts), a brawling brook, and a cave of self-knowing. The other is characterised by sunny fields, shepherds, sheep (and goats), a murmuring stream, and a cottage fenced with olives. These features should suggest a plenitude of classical, Biblical, and Christian symbols.³⁰

The co-existence of these two settings is an evocative reminder of the internal relations between comedy and tragedy that the forest space often suggests. Yet alongside the classical and Christian symbols is a much more urgent place, the 'dark, perilous woods' that reflect a complex dynamic between punishment and pleasure, violence and entertainment so embedded on Manwood's *Treatise*. When Valentine arrives in the forest in search of Silvia, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, he observes 'This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods' as distinct from both custom ('habit') and the 'flourishing peopled towns' (5.4.2, 1, 3).³¹ For Valentine this desert place is a

²⁸ G. F. Reynolds, "'Trees" on the stage of Shakespeare', *Modern Philology* Vol. 5 No. 2., (Oct., 1907), p. 155.

²⁹ A. Stuart Daley, 'Where are the Woods In *As You Like It*?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vo. 34, No. 2, (Summer 1983), p. 173.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p 180.

³¹ Whilst the etymological relationship between Silvia and Silvan/Sylvan it is not established, Shakespeare probably understood a connection, particularly as some sources claim that he was the first to introduce the name into England from Italy (there are, however, examples of other writers before Shakespeare, notably in a translation of Virgil published by Caxton in 1490). The etymology is fascinating, particularly in the light of the relationship between poetry and the forest: Ben Jonson, for example, in his *Works* (1616) uses the term 'forest' as heading for some of his poems. The term is a

release and a relief, and one in which he can ‘sit alone, unseen of any, / And to the nightingale’s complaining notes / Tune my distress and record my woes’ (5.4.4-6). Yet this isolation will soon turn Valentine into an observer of violence, calling us back to the fateful nightingale and the haunting melody of Philomela. Proteus’s attempted rape of Silvia reminds us of the potential danger that such isolation holds, and the nightingale sings in the shadows as a reminder of cruelty and violence. Whilst Valentine may see seclusion as a haven, both Demetrius and Proteus find the woods (as Titus calls them) ‘deaf’ and ‘dull’. For these lovers the wood turns a blind eye to their hatred or violent desire, and in covering them in darkness they are (albeit temporarily) separated from the implications of their selves

Yet the forest that is, at least according to how Titus read his Ovid, ‘made for murders and for rapes’, is also a refuge for the weary lover and the hunted beloved. Helena’s response to Demetrius’s threats is to submit herself entirely to their implications; translating force into acquiescence and abuse into privilege, she declares:

Your virtue is my privilege. For that
 It is not night when I do see your face
 Therefore I think I am not in the night;
 Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,
 For you in my respect are all the world.
 Then how can it be said I am alone
 When all the world is here to look on me? (2.1.220-226)

In ecclesiastical law, ‘privilege’ refers to the exemption from certain civil or canon laws as granted by the pope; in civil law it refers to a set of rights or immunities granted by a legislative body; and in forest law it refers to a certain sanctuary granted by the king. For Helena, Demetrius’s virtue will grant her ‘privilege’ within the wood; in other words, she must or does believe that he has the virtue to give her sanctuary or safety within the wood and its night. Helena’s belief that Demetrius’s ‘virtue’ is her ‘privilege’ trades her body as the property of his honour, making him both the authority and the owner of the wood to which she submits. Helena’s love for Demetrius dissolves any boundaries between honour and horror and transports her private kingdom into a ‘detested vale’. Helena’s beliefs are fantasy; Demetrius cares little for her ‘privilege’ or, it seems, her virtue, let alone his own. But as Helena recasts her wood from Demetrius’s language of hatred into the topography of asylum, she offers herself as the possessed animal to his hunt. Where Helena makes herself a ‘wood of worlds’, Demetrius declares himself to be ‘wood within this wood’ (2.1.192). Helena offers herself completely to the environment whereas Demetrius despises it. As Helena sees sanctuary Demetrius feels madness. For the lovers, the wood becomes a semantic landscape through which they create either empathy or erasure. Both lovers look for excuses in their environment and part of what makes the forest such an effective arena for the exploration of emotion – desire and violence,

translation of *Sylvae*, ‘meaning a poetic miscellany’. Sylvan refers to ‘one who inhabits a wood or forest; a being of the woods’ and, in literature, appears to often accompany the Satyre, cf. Golding’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Book I, 222. According to Livy’s account of the legend, Rhea Silvia was raped by Mars in a forest where she then conceived the twins, Romulus and Remus, who were cast into the Tiber only to be washed up and suckled by a she-wolf who brought them up in a wood that would then become Rome.

love and hate, loss and recuperation – is the auspice of Nature. Writing of the ‘cosmic matrix’ that Mother Nature was thought to govern, Robert Pogue Harrison explains:

Under the goddess’s reign ... earth and sky were not opposed, nor were life and death, animal and human, male and female, inanimate and animate, matter and form, forest and clearing. These unconditional distinctions (which the forest forever confuses) lie at the basis of “civilisation” as opposed to mere “culture”.³²

As the human world seems to import such distinctions, the forest ‘confuses’ them. Yet such confusion is vital since it enables a the forest to support a sympathetic psychological arena for those in distress or seeking disorder. It is this confusion that Manwood constantly seeks to manage, or even erase. Paradoxically, his careful delineation of the space and what defines it makes the forest a self-consciously unstable environment. For Shakespeare the arbitrariness of the Elizabethan forest sustains a dramatic landscape which can chart both journey and emotion. Demetrius tells Helena: ‘I’ll run from thee and hide me in the brakes, / And leave thee to the mercy of the wild beasts’ (2.1.227-228), then: ‘I will not stay thy questions. Let me go; / Or if thy follow me, do not believe / But I shall do thee mischief in the wood’ (2.1.234-236). For Helena, however, the place itself is merely symbolic, since her landscape is manifest only in relation to her beloved; first, she inverts tales from Ovid, ‘the story hath been changed’, ‘Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase’ (2.1.230, 231), and then she cries: ‘I’ll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell, / To die upon the hand I love so well’ (2.1.243-244). Helena’s ‘wood of worlds’ is always in motion as her self-reflexive drama takes on its multiple roles. Yet despite the turmoil and intensity of the action in the wood, when Puck travels through it in search of the couples, he admits:

Through the forest I have gone,
But Athenian found I none
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower’s force in stirring love.
Night and silence – who is here? (2.2.72-76)

Although nature is the hobgoblin’s domain, he finds only ‘Night and silence’. The inability of the forest to register the prints of its inhabitants makes it a compelling space for the imposition of fantasy. The madness of Helena and Demetrius is erased and silenced by the time Puck travels through the forest’s brakes and briars. Manwood similarly constructs a tension between these worlds of wood, between a semantic construction and an organic space. Seeking not only to define and animate, but also to create the forests, Manwood repeatedly falls back on constructions of order and authority inherent not in the landscape itself but in organised perception. Where the ‘five beasts of the forest’ alert us to its status, the forest courts and the king’s rights sustain the area through ideas of threat and punishment. The sinister synthesis between the materiality of the forest and how it is perceived pervades *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Titus Andronicus*. Puck’s description of the moment Titania wakes to her desire for Bottom, the mechanicals reaction to their asinine friend and ‘Pyramus’s translation’ culminates in the fairy’s

³² Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 19.

delight as he ‘led them on in this distracted fear’ (3.2.31). The opportunities that both Oberon and Puck take in the forest for humiliation are based on the perversion of love, from the emotional into the absurd, under the cover of night. Inculcating this manufactured desire over the body of Titania, Oberon says:

What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take;
Love and languish for his sake.
Be it ounce or cat or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wakest, it is thy dear.
Wake when some vile thing is near (2.2.33-40)

The pun on deer/dear returns Titania to her forest in abject humiliation. The deer is the only one of the animals that Oberon names that would permit the forest landscape to exist as such, and it is through Titania’s manipulated vision that the viable becomes the vile. A little later Oberon will compare himself to a forester, ‘tread[ing] the groves’ ‘with the morning’s love’ (3.2.390, 389), and in doing so return himself to the creative status with which his journey into the lives of the mortals began: ‘We are their parents and original’ (2.1.117).

Much of the arbitrariness of the forest resides in a destabilisation of conventional ideas – to be wild is to be the property of the king, to be free is to be subject to different laws, to be secluded is to be under threat and to be animal is to be safer than to be human. Unlike the park, the meadow or the field, the forest emerges from the language and imperatives of its inhabitants. Yet even if the wood had an authentic fabric or an organic reality it would resist – or at least remain unchanged by – the impositions of its lodgers. As *Dream* draws to a close, we return to the nature of the wood through hunting. Hippolyta and Theseus guide us to the pre-history of this wood where, much like *The Tempest*, the agency of sound charges the landscape to appear:

Go, one of you; find out the forester;
For now our observation is performed.
And since we have the vaward of the 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.
We will, fair Queen, up to the mountain’s top,
And mark the musical confusion
Of hounds and echo in conjunction. (4.1.102-110)

As Theseus releases his hounds to ‘musical confusion’ and ‘echo in conjunction’ we are drawn back to the woods of man’s nature, the woods of hunting, and the voice of Echo forever haunting the air with her love-lost cries. The majesty of the place is animated by the great history of voices and the man-made ‘privileges’ in the creation of the ‘wild’.

As Barber notes, there is actually very little ‘nature’ in *Dream*, and what does come to us emerges through a complex interplay between the pathetic imagination and anthropomorphism. Similarly, the ‘wood’ is manifest as a place in which there may be

'brakes' and 'briars', 'tufts' and 'banks' but these terms are used to mark material moments of our journey with the play and not a stable landscape. The 'horrors' whom Puck refers to, who are compelled 'to wilfully themselves exile from light' seem to wander about the wood as they nightly escape from churchyards, crossways and floods where they 'have burial'. But, despite Puck's dubious tricks and hobgoblin nature, he and Oberon 'are spirits of another sort', who can 'like a forester' 'tread' the 'groves' with the 'morning's love'; and, here, for a brief moment, the forest returns to a semblance of its man-made construction, under the morning light with the idea of the forester keeping its peace and paths as a substantial land. The story of the lovers, according to Hippolyta, 'grows to something of great constancy' and brings the reality of the wood to rest in the traumas of the couples. But, ultimately, these woods are like those in *Titus*, 'dreadful', 'deaf', 'ruthless' and 'dull'; defined by the emotions they absorb and bereft of boundaries:

O, why should nature build so foul a den,
Unless the gods delight in tragedies? (4.1.59-60)³³

Where *Dream* imports the forest to explore the proximities between pleasure and punishment in the language of love, in *Titus Andronicus* it is through the language of destruction that the forest takes shape. Our first experience of the forest begins with Aaron entering as the villain, contemptuous of the part he plays. Armed with his bag of gold he looks for a tree, under which he can bury his gold. Replete with proleptic irony in its images of burial and sacrifice, the tree is a token of Aaron's designs:

He that had wit would think that I had none,
To bury so much gold under a tree,
And never after to inherit it.
Let him that thinks of me so abjectly
Know that this gold must coin a stratagem,
Which, cunningly effected, will beget
A very excellent piece of villainy:
And so repose, sweet gold, for their unrest
[Hides the gold]
That have their alms out of the empress' chest (2.2.1-9).

Dependent again upon the dramatic construction of isolation, the tree alerts us to Aaron's seclusion. Tamora then enters with her version of the landscape, which is fashioned like sixteenth century tapestries with images of pleasure and delight, of hunting, desire and elegance, in suspended animation:

My lovely Aaron, wherefore look'st thou sad,
When every thing doth make a gleeful boast?
The birds chant melody on every bush,
The snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun,
The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind
And make a chequer'd shadow on the ground:
Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit,

³³ William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate, Arden Third Series (London: Thomas Learning, 1997). All subsequent references, unless otherwise stated, are to this edition.

And, whilst the babbling echo mocks the hounds,
 Replying shrilly to the well-tuned horns,
 As if a double hunt were heard at once,
 Let us sit down and mark their yellowing noise;
 And, after conflict such as was supposed
 The wandering prince and Dido once enjoy'd,
 When with a happy storm they were surprised
 And curtain'd with a counsel-keeping cave,
 We may, each wreathed in the other's arms,
 Our pastimes done, possess a golden slumber;
 Whiles hounds and horns and sweet melodious birds
 Be unto us as is a nurse's song
 Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep (2.2.10-29).

As Tamora invests the scene with an exquisite tension between the aggressive and inert – the chanting melody of birds, quivering leaves, cooling winds, and shadows – and the powerfully coiled, muscular nature of the snake, the mocking echo, and the bellowing hounds we move through the topography of the play, the forest that is created by stories and myths – Dido, Diana, Philomel – desire, revenge and authority. The dynamic that Tamora establishes in the landscape between the predatory and the precious, the tempter and the tempted, the secluded cave and the ‘double hunt’ looks forward to *Dream* and carefully captures the dramatic ambiguity of the forest. This is the forest that can turn from the lovers’ ‘pastime’ and their ‘golden slumbers’ to brutal rape, mutilation and murder. The formal poetic mode that conjures both the aesthetic and emotional fabric of the scene is, of course, Ovidian and lends a bitter irony to Titus’s later description of the wood as having been ‘patterned by the poet’ (4.1.57).

As Aaron picks up Tamora’s image of the snake, so he inhabits it:

What signifies my deadly-standing eye,
 My silence and my cloudy melancholy,
 My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls
 Even as an adder when she doth unroll
 To do some fatal execution? (2.2.32-35)

The bodies, desires and fears of the predators, who occupy its scenery, create the forest: just as the ‘wilderness of tigers’ is sustained in Tamora. The metamorphic movement of the scene emerges as the characters change, occupy and generate their landscape through the snake, Venus, Diana, Juno, and the hunt. As the predators are established so the prey enters and Aaron and Tamora retreat like snakes back into the grass, only to remerge once again changed. Nothing is stable here, and this radical instability makes the forest a very frightening place: contrary to forest law, there are no boundaries and no limits, since the bodies of its visitors, dead or alive, constantly reinvent the space. When Bassianus enters he moves Tamora from the participant to the observer:

Or is it Dian, habited like her,
 Who hath abandoned her holy groves
 To see the general hunting in this forest? (2.2.57-59).

As she has moved from Venus to Diana so she develops the images through Ovid's story and transforms Bassianus into the hart, only to be hunted by his own hounds.³⁴ The ways in which the characters move through the images associated with the forest and the stories that dwell in them centralises the theme of metamorphoses – both literally and metaphorically – as we move ever increasingly towards Lavinia's 'transformation' and Ovid's Philomela. Lavinia now takes up the image of the hunter hunted and the rhythm of transformation sets the pace for the changing landscapes of the scene. Like a modern hologram the forest moves between horror and beauty, pleasure and danger depending on the body of the character through which we view it. A language that is heavy with anticipation sustains the fabric of the forest, pulling the very atmosphere into the story of Lavinia's destruction. Yet once again the landscape changes as we move from the predators' – Chiron and Demetrius, Aaron and Tamora – forest to the 'valley' which supports Tamora's 'raven-coloured love'. Organically, a valley is a hollow or stretch of ground lying between hills, metaphorically, however, it is usually associated with death, darkness and dissolution in the image of the 'shadow'.³⁵ Lavinia seems to combine the two in her use of the term, suggesting a dark secluded area which is both foreboding and isolated. The matter that makes up the various forest landscapes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Titus Andronicus* includes a grove, valley, tree, bush, thicket, moss, mistletoe, vale and a 'secret hole'. What becomes clear from this nature is that the 'forest' provides an area that is isolated, and within this isolation different signs and properties are placed for the plot to develop and emotions to unravel.

When Tamora turns to her sons in mock humiliation she redefines the landscape that was once her loving ally:

Have I not reason, think you, to look pale?
 These two have 'ticed me hither to this place:
 A barren detested vale you see it is;
 The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
 O'ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe;
 Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds
 Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven. (2.2.91-97)

The forest moves with the mood and scheme of the play from sensuous lustre to ravaged decay, where even the seasons cannot hold on to their selves. Summer is sterile, poisoned even, by the mistletoe which hangs where green leaves should be. Lavinia's 'valley' is now a 'vale' and the image of the vale of tears becomes complete.³⁶ The glittering backdrop to the lovers' desire is now barren, ominous, and aggressive. Where is the melody of the chanting birds, the 'cheerful sun', the 'green leaves' and the 'cooling wind'? Tamora peoples the landscape with the noises and creatures of her imagined hell. The hunt and its yelping hounds are now replaced by a cacophony of misery – 'hissing snakes', 'swelling toads' 'urchins' with such 'fearful and confused cries' (2.2.100, 101, 102)

³⁴ Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Bk III.

³⁵ According to the *OED*, English versions of the Bible, from Coverdale's translation in 1535, have 'the valley of the shadow of death' (Psalm XXIII, 4). CF. Psalm CXXXIV has a vale – the Valley of Baca – that was sometimes translated as having tears.

³⁶ Although the phrase comes from the Catholic prayer, *Salve Regina*, it echoes Psalm XXIII in its reference to the valley of the shadow of death. See above.

As any mortal body hearing it
Should straight fall mad, or else die suddenly (103-4).

The forest becomes a place of madness and horror, and that which was once gentle is now fatal. Much like the wood in *Dream*, the landscape can change at the whim of its authority, the purpose of its place, or the perspective of its inhabitants. The forest is never secure or stable; it is never essential or consistent but rather a map of the desiring or diseased mind, a backdrop for transformations and a space for the solitary – for the hunter and the hunted. We realise that beneath the lustful verdure of Tamora's landscape lay the dark, cavernous forest that Aaron described:

The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull:
There speak and strike, brave boys, and take your turns;
There serve your lust, shadowed from heaven's eye,
And revel in Lavinia's treasury (1.1.628-631).

The isolation or solitude so often associated with the forest is partly derived from the idea that it is densely 'shadowed' or canopied, hidden not just from the human but, more significantly, 'heaven's eye', both god and the sun. That the forest can shield the guilty from god's view is rooted in the system of thought that sees the human race as sky-worshippers, those who look up to god and heaven beyond the realm of their selves.³⁷ This is precisely the reason that Aaron sends Tamora's sons into the wood: 'shadowed from heaven's eye'. The 'monstrous' forest presents an alternative site to the civilised space of social bonds and the moral responsibility of consensual institutions: as a refuge from law – personal or social – the forest can suppress crimes and conceal criminals. The fear and threat of the forest is predominantly due to its apparently amoral ability to obscure wrongdoing, yet within its darkness another version of the law exists, and one that is absolutely based on a single authority and a punitive system of control. For Manwood, forest law is part of what defines the space as unique but also as essential to the wider fabric of the community. The strange, ambiguous woods of *Titus* that can reveal and conceal, permit and destroy are always fluctuating on the borders of civilisation. Like Manwood's forest it begins as a province for hunting under the authority of the emperor. The forest's role, however, in the recognition of the boundaries between power and play, pastime and patriarchy is almost instantly subverted by Tamora's assignation with Aaron. As Tamora transforms the sport of hunting into the 'pastime' of love-making, Aaron transforms the killing of the hart into the destruction of Lavinia. Despite the inevitable role of the forest in the destruction of Lavinia and Bassianus it will always remain an emotional space for the realisation of desires and the dissolution of law. At the heart of the idea of the forest, according to Harrison, is the tension between the origins of social living

³⁷ Telling a story of the 'first forests' Giambattista Vico explains how the giants lived recklessly and anarchically under the canopied skies until one day lightening struck and thunder clapped calling the giants to look up at the sky through the forest's shade. On seeing the sky they became in awe of something beyond their realm, and in fear of auspices, reading the weather as anger or punishment, they changed their living habits. Revealed by lightening and made accountable by the thunder they began to establish communes, privacy and bonds; they lived according to an invisible authority and on the basis on institutional ceremonies. Where the sky became associated with the heavens, '*the forests become monstrous, for they hide the prospect of god,*' as quoted and italicised by Harrison, p. 6.

and the threat of its destruction.³⁸ In this context, what emerges from the forest is a desire to build out of its landscape: to clear the scrub and create the ‘universal institutions of humanity’: religion, matrimony and burial. As the forest gives birth to the social, so it becomes a metaphor for human institutions: but this metaphor is always provocative for as the forest returns us to our roots so it is also boundless. That the forest sits at the end of human institutions, lying ‘outside’ or beyond institutional order is what creates and sustains the eternal opposition between the topographies. Precisely because the forest is ‘outside’ (*forīs*) it disturbs us, challenging our methods of orientation and our psychologies of community.³⁹ It is this anxiety that lies at the heart of Manwood’s text, his insistent need to determine the space of the forest and set its laws down marks the changing status of the forest in the Elizabethan imagination.

The plays’ interest in order and chaos lies at the heart of their forests and exposes a profound anxiety of orientation. What happens in both the forests of *Titus* and *Dream* is a radical unhinging of place and protection, law and order: if part of the necessity of boundaries is that they protect us, part of the threat of the forest is that it has none. In Manwood’s treatise he repeatedly tries to set boundaries for the forest but these boundaries are always in flux since they depend not on design, enclosure or space but on the ever-shifting movements of the animals in habitation. The hunter and the hunted shape the forest, and as long as they do it will remain a place of disorientation. The universal institutions that Harrison speaks of as rising out of the forest are central to the plays’ exploration of social borders. As *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* explores the social viability of marriage and the destabilisation of authority, so *Titus Andronicus* explores the destruction of marriage, the failure of religion and the significance of burial. The human institutions that are born of the forest are tested to their limits and where *Dream* tries to reinstate a version of natural law, *Titus* can only turn to literary values in the face of its civil ruins. Burial rites are intricately tied up with what it means to be Roman and Titus’s interment of his sons and sacrifice of Tamora’s establishes early on in the play how ‘civilised’ institutions work. But as the forest becomes the centre for the destruction of such values the boundaries dissolve and those civilising institutions crumble. When Aaron is buried alive outside of the city walls we realise that the forest has reached the absolute limit of its containment. As the forest moves figuratively closer to the city, the city raises its walls. But these walls are always contingent.

Titus ends with Lucius directing the interment of his father and sister:

My father and Lavinia shall forthwith
 Be closed in our household’s monument;
 As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,
 No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,
 No mournful bell shall ring her burial,

³⁸ Harrison is not writing as a historian but as a cultural anthropologist. His claims are not literal; they are suggestive of the complex dynamic between myth and environment in the development of social values. John Gilles takes a similar position when he says: ‘Vico’s importance is in systematically thinking through the meaning of geography as an articulation of human perspective, and for suggesting how the most striking perspective-affirming conventions of ancient geography – those pertaining to privileged centres and enclosing edges – might be understood in precise “poetic” or dramaturgical terms’, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 7.

³⁹ See Harrison, p. 8.

But throw her forth to beats and birds to prey:
Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
And being dead, let birds on her take pity (5.3.192-199).

Lucius attempts to restore those boundaries through the bodies and burials of the dead: Tamora is thrown out of the city's walls with the beasts and returned to the wild to decompose as part of the 'wilderness' to which she belonged; Lavinia and Titus return to the tombs of Rome and the forest and the city are safely removed from each other once again. But such a separation is always notional, and, as Marcus reminds us, 'O, why would nature build so foul a den, / Unless the gods delight in tragedies' (4.1.59-60). Tragedy lies at the edge of the city, ready to consume its waste.⁴⁰

Yet despite the importance of limits in *Titus*, the woods are also boundless, shaped as much by the literary as the contemporary. As Lavinia reveals her ordeal through Ovid, so Titus makes sense of it through the poet. Realising what has happened to his daughter, he exclaims:

Lavinia, wert thou thus surprised, sweet girl,
Ravished and wronged as Philomela was,
Forced in the ruthless, vast and gloomy woods?
[*Lavinia nods.*] See, see!
Ay, such a place there is where we did hunt –
O, had we never, never hunted there! –
Patterned by that the poet here describes,
By nature made for murders and for rapes (4.1.51-58).

Titus turns to *Metamorphosis* for the aetiology of his woods: nature has created the landscape and the poet gives life to it. Ovid animates the latent matter of the 'ruthless, vast and gloomy woods' and as the human and animal worlds come into contact with each other memory and emotion are born. Titus does not repudiate the landscape only his part in animating it: 'O, had we never, never hunted there!'. The woods become meaningful only when they come into contact with human design, and hunting, secures the ambivalence of the place as it moves between cruelty and pleasure.⁴¹

⁴⁰ In *Titus*, the ways in which Rome tries to define itself as separate and civilised, in defence of a chaos primarily associated with barbarism, becomes profoundly ironic in the play. In terms of its origins, however, Rome was, of course, founded as an 'asylum' out of the forest in which it began. Although Romulus and Remus found refuge in the forests of Latium in which they grew up, they were compelled to transform them once they discovered their true identities. Building their separate cities because they could not agree on single terms, Remus mocked the walls of his brother's city by climbing over them, inciting Romulus to kill him. Romulus vowed to kill anyone who breached the walls of Rome again. Rome became a refuge precisely because of the boundaries it held, from both the forests and the figurative wilderness of the uninstitutionalised: 'The god of sacred boundaries in Roman religion was Silvanus, deity of the outlying wilderness, and historically the natural boundaries of the Roman *res publica* were drawn by the margins of the undomesticated forests, which in ancient Roman law had the status of *res nullius* (belonging to no one)', Harrison, p. 49. Rome exists in opposition to the forests that simultaneously threaten and contain it. But such boundaries as *Titus* tries to reinstate are always illusions – as Rome emerges from a forest so it can always return to one and, within the play, the notional spaces of civilised and barbaric become indistinct.

⁴¹ This ambivalence is captured, at a more playful level, by the horticultural notion of the 'wilderness', when a wood is artificially created in a garden environment to suggest solitude; or, as one seventeenth century preacher puts it: 'a multitude of thick bushes and trees, affecting an ostentation of solitariness in the midst of worldly pleasures', as quoted by Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 207.

Part of *Titus*'s exploration of the civilised and the barbaric is negotiated through the use of space and time, and the psychology of place becomes fundamental in defining what these terms mean. The history of anxiety associated with the forest is predominantly universal (largely based on a primal fear of darkness and predators) but that sense of threat in darkness was translated by the church into a sense of spiritual blindness or removal from God. In Christian terms, forests were representative of both error and separation and their wandering paths were a challenge to those who had strayed and erred to find salvation.⁴² But for Manwood, the Elizabethan forest is less about God and more about 'man'; about authority and possession and the value systems that law and order presume to create as well as depend upon.

The trees on the stage of *Titus*, however, are largely strategic: for Aaron the tree provides a space under which he can hide his gold; for Tamora, 'this dismal yew' – which is presumably the same tree (Bate notes this as 'Henslowe's bay tree' or an 'elder tree' as later described in the letter Aaron plants with Bassianus's body) – illustrates the specious tale she tells her sons to further incite them to the rape and mutilation of Lavinia.⁴³ The tree, like the forest landscape, changes to accommodate the psychological drives and emotional needs of its inhabitants.⁴⁴ The relationship between the mind and the forest is paralleled in the relationship between the tree and the body: the body is cut down, lopped, hewed, and burned like the tree. The lover's arms as the branches of trees are distinctly Ovidian and feature with painful pathos in the image of Lavinia, severed – from loving and from life. The body as the tree literalises the relationship between the human and the forest. As the status of the human comes into crisis in the forest we notice how versions of power are played out through the felling of the body, like the tree, in warfare – psychological or physical. As *Titus*'s forest dehumanises it also amplifies with horrid glory what human impulses have come to mean: Tamora's desire dresses the landscape through her encircling arms, Aaron's lusty revenge sets the scene for destruction and the emperor's hounds howl as the hunt goes on. The idea of the forest – as a place of dehumanisation – keeps the image of the body in constant motion as it moves, like the landscape itself, between pleasure and savagery, the animal and the human.

⁴² Spenser writes most particularly of this in the trials of the Redcrosse Knight in the *Faerie Queene*, but he, in turn, is indebted to Dante and Petrarch as well as Christian allegory. Spenser's 'wandering wood' and the monstrous Error who lives at the heart of it represent a synthesis of the allegorical and the mythical.

⁴³ See Jonathan Bate's Arden edition, quoting E. M. Waith's Oxford edition p. 168, n. 2.2 and 9.1.

⁴⁴ *Titus*, of course, features both the material and the metaphoric wood; requiring the isolation to commit its deeds and the ground, twigs and briars to conceal them. But the *idea* of the wood as a place used to indicate error and anxiety is clearly at the forefront of contemporary productions. In his *Book of Plaies* Simon Foreman describes a production of *The Winter's Tale*, in 1611, in which 'Perdita was carried into bohemia & ther laid in a forrest.' As Reynolds says, 'the text does not mention tree or forest; the scene, as we all remember, is the famous "coast of Bohemia."' Even the *History of Dorastus and Fawnia* does not suggest a wood.⁴⁴ Similarly, in *Macbeth* (1610), Foreman noted "how Macbeth and Banquo Two noblemen of Scotland, riding through a wood, there stood before them three women Fairies." Neither Shakespeare's text nor Holinshed's *Chronicles* mention a wood at this point, only a heath. Foreman can only have taken this idea from the performance and from a wood setting, which must have been used symbolically rather than literally: to suggest 'solitude and desolation'; 'here, as in the Revels accounts, we have "trees for a wilderness," and without a single hint of their presence in the text', see Reynolds, 147-158.

The ways in which the play uses the body and the tree is symptomatic of how trees were being dramatically explored on the Elizabethan stage. Yet how the forest is actually represented on stage is ambiguous: we know that trees were often used as properties and that they are mentioned in stage records; forests, on the other hand, could be a collection of timber trunks, a painted cloth, or simply one ‘tree’ strategically placed.⁴⁵ Woods were used to conjure danger and solitude – and presumably to evoke the danger itself of solitude, thus presenting isolation as a condition of weakness and vulnerability. What we begin to notice is that the isolation of the forest consistently reinvents the community as protective or safe; only the multiple gaze reflects institutional order and only the language of ownership imposes it. But woods were also used to create the emotional landscape of danger in isolation even when the practicalities of the scene did not demand them.⁴⁶ Manwood’s *Treatise* attempts to record this landscape as it moves through the transition from allegory to improvement, from a customary habitat to private property. Above all, however, Manwood’s text tries to redress the intense anxiety that the forest creates by offering a legal framework through which the animal and social become distinct. However residual this anxiety seems to be, Shakespeare develops his forests through the multiple spaces of the material, the social and the mimetic that Manwood offers.

The wood signifies a point at which these multiple spaces intersect and metamorphoses takes place: the ‘waylesse woods’ as Golding translates them in Book III of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (l.171) are the shadow of humanity, following it around not in antithesis but like ‘a guilty conscience’.⁴⁷ Shadowing as well as engendering our human institutions, the forest holds the shape of natural form as we encounter the very limits of social law. Primarily a place of isolation – ‘deaf’ and ‘dull’ – the forest takes us into its shadows to explore the limits of social values: how we try to recover or represent those values becomes the site of human drama at the centre of both *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Titus Andronicus*.⁴⁸ But as both plays encounter their forests so they also lose their memory and the distinctions that pre-existed this landscape collapse and fade: as Demetrius admits, ‘These things seem small and undistinguishable, / Like far-off mountains turnèd into clouds’; or as Titus howls:

O, had we never, never hunted there! –

⁴⁵ ‘Perhaps this “extended” use of woods, ... for any scene of desolation seems purely theoretical and impossible.... Fortunately, however, direct proof of it exists in a single line of the Revels accounts (p. 41; 1572-3): “for this provision *and* carriage of trees *and* other things to the Coorte for a wilderness in a playe, viij sh. vj d.” No clearer statement could be desired: woods in 1572-3 were used at court to represent a wilderness’, Reynolds, p. 156.

⁴⁶ Reynolds refers specifically to Greene’s *Alphonsus* (1599), a play ‘full of references to woods’. He draws attention to a moment in which the Turkish king, Amurack, waking from a nightmare about his wife, Fausta, rises from his throne and banishes her. With the scene still in place: ‘Medea suddenly enters and inquires of Fausta what it is that causes her to leave the court “and all alone passé through these thickest groues.” Why does Greene introduce this remark about groves. The scene at court certainly does not require, does not even allow such an allusion’, p. 155.

⁴⁷ See Harrison’s analysis of the law, p. 63.

⁴⁸ There is, I think, an important relationship to be explored between ‘shadow’ and ‘shade’ as it exists in the forest as comparative darkness and relief from the sun. Oberon is, of course, the ‘king of shadows’ casting him as something – or someone – inscrutable as well as in charge of the forest’s underworld. Lavinia, on the other hand, ‘lopped and hewed’ ‘of those two branches’ ‘whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in’ (2.3.17-18) is bereft of a different shadow; one that humanises, rather than animalises her.

Patterned by that the poet here describes,
By nature made for murders and for rapes.

The forest lurks beside us as the ghost of civilisation – its birth and its forgetting.