

Globability
The Virtue of Worlding
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In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle explains that “everything that comes to be moves towards a principle, i.e. an end ... and the actuality is the end” (9.8.1050a5–10).¹ This teleological progression, whereby potentiality (*dynamis*) is transformed into actuality (*energeia*), informs Aristotle’s understanding of virtue (*aretē*) as the power that brings something into its most complete expression of being. Virtue is thus inherently aspirational: it entails movement towards a goal in which a thing’s fullest potential is realized – its “essence or function ... or that for the sake of which it exists,” in the words of C. D. C Reeve (xvi).² Observing that all things have a unique function, Aristotle seeks in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to determine the virtue of humans: “For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and in general for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the ‘well’ is thought to reside in the function, so it would seem to be for man” (1.7.1097b25–30).³ Aristotle concludes that humans fulfill their function most completely through being happy (*eudaimonia*) – a state that is not valued because of its moral implications, but rather because it maximizes human flourishing, enabling human beings to be most fully themselves. The potential for happiness is intrinsic to human nature, though certain conditions of “misfortune,” such as enslavement or being female, can prevent human beings from manifesting their fullest potential. Asserting that people are by nature social and political, Aristotle argues that a solitary life was not sufficient for happiness, though solitude might defend against some of the vulnerabilities to fortune that accompany a life lived among others. In Aristotle’s view *eudaimonia* is not individualistic but is rather relationally manifested and affected by external contingencies of fortune or

¹ Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2001), 689–926.

² *Ibid.*, Introduction.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. Lesley Brown (Oxford University Press, 2009).

misfortune. As Martha Nussbaum explains, “Aristotle gives the polis and our activities in and for it an important role” because human growth is “an ongoing process that requires continued support from without.”⁴ Ideally, human flourishing has positive effects that extend beyond the individual and does not necessitate or depend on others’ subjugation, though some conflict is unavoidable.

Aristotle’s understanding of virtue as the complete fulfillment of a thing’s potential offers a useful way to think not only about happiness as the fullest manifestation of human potential but also about the larger potential of the world as a relational and communal entity. As a number of contributors to this handbook observe (see esp. Bloom and Doty, Crosbie, and Rust), the achievement of human happiness benefits not only the individual but also reverberates outward to a larger community, which is linked together by human relationships. This community might also include broader environmental interactions with nature and non-human entities in the world – in the opening of his *Politics*, Aristotle himself famously describes man as a “political animal” and compares him to “bees and other gregarious animals” who also show tendencies toward self-organization in groups. Indeed, individual human flourishing might be understood to benefit the world at large and to reach its fullest potential when flourishing is universally shared among humans and living things, rather than selectively apportioned. It may seem to follow from Aristotle’s understanding of *eudaimonia* that the world itself reaches its fullest potential when all of the individual beings and things within it are allowed to flourish. Such a conception of *world* seeks to encompass everything contained within the globe or planet, or perhaps even the entire universe, depending upon how expansively one chooses to define the scope of the world.

It is not difficult to see how anthropocentric systems and hierarchies, including global capitalism, work against such a holistic understanding of *eudaimonia* by partitioning the world into empires and unequal distributions of power and wealth, enabling selective flourishing at the expense of other beings or places, and ultimately rendering certain lives expendable by disregarding the equilibrium necessary to sustain a complex ecology. By contrast, a nonanthropocentric worldview sacrifices selective interests to the larger whole. It values collectivity – extended as far as possible – above individual happiness, perhaps adopting the utilitarian view that collective

⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Revised edn. (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 347.

happiness leads to greater individual happiness. But are there also dangers to conceiving of the world in universalizing terms? What assumptions do we make when we presuppose that the world is one thing, and that human virtue is maximized by conceiving of the world in the largest possible frame? In what ways are these assumptions conditioned by our unthinking acceptance of an integrated and totalizing notion of the world that is habituated by our own globalized sense of interconnection and the economic, technological, social, and environmental (as well as viral) pathways that foster it?

As has long been recognized, the early-modern period marked a crucial stage in the history of global capitalism as well as a pivotal transition in the way the world was understood. As scholars such as Ayesha Ramachandran, Denis Cosgrove, and Ricardo Padrón have shown, the conception of the world *as globe* that was catalyzed in the sixteenth century by cartographic, navigational, astronomical, and imperialistic developments imposed a certain violence on the world by reducing it to an abstracted totality, which in turn made it susceptible to epistemological conquest as well as to imperialistic possession and subjugation.⁵ This privileging of a single world also carried out a totalizing and homogenizing effect that flattened out differences at the same time that it extended rigid systems of hierarchy across expansive reaches of space and time. In the wake of the world's figuration as globe and subsequent centuries of escalating globalization that have brought us to our present time, how might we begin to foster a more pluralistic understanding of world that does not sacrifice the integrity of its multiple parts in service of a singular whole? How might we enable a world that allows differences to thrive and that protects and nourishes its spaces of disjuncture, while also honoring the existence of the larger world – or worlds – beyond? The achievement of a truly virtuous world seems to lie in understanding its *dynamis* as a capacity for both pluralism and harmony – capacities that need not be mutually exclusive nor bounded in their interlocking scopes.

To understand the world's potentiality in this way is to re-conceive the world as not a thing or an object, but rather as a dynamic entity, a self-actualizing configuration that continuously strives to fulfill a higher function. In the words of Martin Heidegger,

⁵ Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Ricardo Padrón, *The Spacious World: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

World is not a mere collection of the things – countable and uncountable, known and unknown – that are present at hand. Neither is world a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are present. World worlds, and is more fully in being than all those tangible and perceptible things in the midst of which we take ourselves to be at home.⁶

Heidegger's characterization of the world as an active entity that *worlds* offers a useful rejoinder to Aristotle's aspirational understanding of virtue as the fulfillment of a thing's inherent function. To identify the world's function is not to attempt to contain or describe the world, but rather to enable and to cultivate its aspirational becoming and to celebrate its future potentiality. Our tendency to view modern-day globalization as a *fait accompli* can sometimes obscure alternative or premodern conceptions of the world, preventing us from seeing the world's past configurations and future potentialities. As Pheng Cheah puts it, "The fundamental shortcoming of equating the world with a global market is that it assumes that globalization creates a world."⁷ Indeed, to understand the world as globe or as a globalized entity manifested through historical processes of economic, technological, and cultural integration is to fail to perceive how this manifestation is but one possible historically contingent iteration of world – an actualization that is neither inevitable nor permanent.

Shakespeare's plays invite us to embrace a more dynamic and inchoate understanding of world while also offering a view of the sometimes violent processes of *worlding* that take place when worlds fracture, evolve, combust, or become reconfigured. While a number of Shakespeare's plays register incipient aspects of globalization, they also offer alternative models of worlds that are construed in a wide variety of ways – through shared values or ethics, conditions of belonging and un-belonging, communal agreements, legal infrastructures and state policies, religious affiliations, natural and supernatural conditions of possibility, and even metaphysical and ontological distinctions. And while Shakespeare's worlds are sometimes linked to geopolitical boundaries of region, nation, or empire, they tend not to be globally oriented. In fact, the word "global" figures not at all in Shakespeare's canon. We do find the word "globe" (a total of 12 times) – sometimes referring to the Globe theater, sometimes referring to the earth

⁶ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 23.

⁷ Pheng Cheah, *What is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Duke University Press, 2016).

as a planet or to another astronomical body, sometimes to a sphere or the head of a human body, and sometimes to an abstract or metaphorical notion of world. While rich and varied, this number of instances pales in comparison to the far larger number of times the word “world” appears in Shakespeare’s plays – more than 650 times. At the very least, the preponderance with which Shakespeare uses the term tells us something about the powerful utility of “world” as a category that might be relied upon to help express any number of concepts, feelings, opinions, or everyday sentiments. And yet, despite the rich potential of “world” to communicate large and complex ideas in a single word, its meaning in the plays was not consistent or stable but encompassed a range of diverse connotations that were by turns spatial, temporal, metaphysical, existential, experiential, political, and communal. And while Shakespeare’s understandings of world rarely register a sense of the world conceived-as-globe, they possess many elements that are intimately familiar to us. In this way, Shakespeare’s plays enable us to not only see around and beyond the realities of our globalized world but also to perceive alternative formulations of world as *already present* and alive in world we live in, and in all the potential worlds that will continue to be. In other words, Shakespeare’s plays awaken us to the inherent virtue of the world, as an entity that is always in a state of becoming, and therefore dynamic and multiplicitous.

Illustrating Heidegger’s sense of the world’s active agency, Shakespeare often figures the world as a collective subject that “thinks” and is a source of opinion and judgment. For example, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the Duke pronounces to the courtroom that “the world thinks, and I think so, too” that Shylock will offer a “gentle answer” by granting mercy to Antonio (4.1.18, 35). In this case, the Duke’s invocation of the “world” seems to invite Shylock into its “gentle” fold, but actually it does so only on its own (Gentile) terms, and is thus a world defined by exclusion and compulsion. At other times, Shakespeare invokes the notion of a totalizing world only to expose the hegemonic power structures that undergird it. In *Othello*, Emilia says that she would not make a cuckold of Iago in exchange for a “joint-ring,” “measures of lawn,” or other material possessions, but would readily agree to do so for “the whole world,” for “who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?” (4.3.) She further reasons that even if something (such as cuckolding) is deemed “wrong in the world,” if it is “your own world,” it would lie within your power to “quickly make it right.” Perceiving “rightness” in the world to be as arbitrary as its structure of power relations, Emilia’s hypothetical wager acknowledges her own disempowerment, even as her sense of the world’s

fungibility allows her to imagine it otherwise. In a different way, Cleopatra resists Caesar's totalizing conception of world as empire by endeavoring to rewrite imperial history through a reliance on counterfactuals. By extending the possibility of an alternative world through a presencing of what *might have been*, Cleopatra's approach models not simply a course of equivocation or denial, but rather a questioning of the epistemic authority that sustains an imperial world.⁸

In Shakespeare's plays, a world is no sooner established than it is questioned, taken apart, turned upside down, reimagined, or destroyed: this is the distinctive "virtue" of worlding in his imagination. The delimitation of one world – be it Venice, Rome, Egypt, Christendom, fairyland, the court, the island, or the forest – always marks the coexistence of other worlds. Miranda's famous heralding of a "brave new world" apprehends the arrival of her estranged ancestral kin on the shores of the island – the only world she has known since the time of her exile (5.1.23). As she registers the "wondrous" return of her European past, the island's horizons expand to accommodate a coexisting but disconnected set of dynastic and geopolitical dynamics elsewhere, distant and yet ever-encroaching. We often think of worlds as constituted by their completeness, but Shakespeare shows us that if worlds are always plural, they are in fact created out of gaps, seams, and absences. In demonstrating the fluid potency of worlds, their constant renegotiation of boundaries, and their potential to always become something else, Shakespeare illustrates how the collective agency of world contains a latent capacity for multiplicity.

In other less fractious ways, Shakespeare's worlds exhibit this latent capacity through their frequent layerings, crossings, and mixings. His worlds are often vertically and temporally layered upon one another, revealing a density that reflects the accretions of time and history. For example, the Mediterranean worlds of many of the plays are simultaneously pre-Christian and post-Christian, ancient and contemporary, familiar and foreign – a palimpsest of worlds that bleed into one another. The Ephesian world of *The Comedy of Errors* is variously distinguished by its association with the temple of Artemis, its legendary founding by Amazons, a reputation for sorcery and occult practices, the voyages of St. Paul, its thriving commercial port, and a *longue durée* history of imperial conquest by the Persian, Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman empires. The world of

⁸ For a fuller account of this argument, see Degenhardt, "The Horizons of Antony and Cleopatra: Temporal Distance, Counterfactual Histories, and the Potentiality of Now," *SEL: Studies in English Literature* 62.1 (Winter 2022).

the play is thus multitudinous, rather than singular, ripe with the potency of its many accumulated legacies. In other plays, Shakespeare brings into view the coexistence of multiple worlds by positing metaphysical crossings that intermingle human mortals with the worlds of gods, fairies, creatures, spirits, and ghosts. Plays like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III* feature terrifying encounters with the undead, who pierce the boundaries of the mortal world to bring unwanted messages from a world beyond. In other plays like *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*, a god swoops down from the heavens to offer protection or guidance that would be otherwise unavailable to earthly mortals. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the worlds of gods and mortals, mythical creatures and mechanicals, converge in the "forest," a threshold zone where Nature operates as the avatar for emotionally charged divine passions. As the play acknowledges, the events of the forest are also a function of theater, a dream-inducing medium which constitutes a world unto itself and is comprised of distinct material forms, representational semiotics, generic conventions, and fictional and performative capacities. The play's ability to imagine the world otherwise – and indeed to remake it – is ultimately enabled by theatrical artifice, comparable in its most sinister form to the administration of a mind-altering "potion," but also capable of engendering the expansive virtual experience of dreaming. At the conclusion of the play, Puck enters to inform the audience that all of the play's manipulations of desire have been machinated not only by the "shadowy" forces of theater but are also the work of a "dream," which has managed to rearrange everyone's relationships so that they may safely return to the awakened world of reality.

As Shakespeare's dream world suggests, theater has the power to make things happen and is thus both a "world" and a site of worlding, even if its spell is short-lived and ultimately gives way to the conservative world of the court or other dominant structure of power. By the end of a play, its world has been altered, whether shattered in the case of tragedy or reconstituted in the case of comedy – in both cases opened up by new possibilities. Critics often speak of Shakespeare's "possible" worlds, and Aristotle himself argued that drama should always work within a balance between the possible and the probable.⁹ But the worlding power of Shakespeare lies rather in theater's *potentiality*, which often leaves the relative predictability of the "possible" behind and opens previously unimaginable configurations, relations, and scenes. The virtue of "world" for Shakespeare depends on its dynamic capacity to be otherwise, on the way worlds come to live

⁹ See for instance Simon Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); compare Aristotle's *Poetics* 1.9 1451a36–1451b5, 3.25 1451b9–25.

in the temporary space of imagination and dreaming that theater indulges. Sometimes its capacity for change bleeds out of the theater and into the worlds that exist beyond the play, such as our own. In its most potent moments, theatrical fiction brings about change not by means of manipulation or compulsion, as is the case in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but rather by enabling shifts in perspective that are motivated by virtues such as empathy, understanding, optimism, tolerance, and learning.

Above all, Shakespeare's worlds are comprised of relationships, and it is by virtue of these relationships that his characters come to see things in new ways and then to make adjustments that correspond to their altered perspectives. I turn for the remainder of my discussion to *As You Like It*, which demonstrates through its focus on the formation of new relationships how even small shifts in perspective can begin to create new worlds. Like several other Shakespeare plays, *As You Like It* begins with exile, though even this condition of exclusion and deprivation is given an alternative cast, as Celia sets off willingly from her father's court to accompany her banished cousin Rosalind, announcing at the conclusion of Act I, "Now go we in content / To liberty, and not to banishment" (1.3.144–145).¹⁰ Indeed, Celia's ability to perceive exile as a means to "liberty" establishes a paradigm of seeing otherwise – and often optimistically – that runs throughout the play. Faced with the threat of extreme deprivation and precarity, Celia decides in this moment to turn away from the security of home and towards an unknown future, in a sense doubling down on her risk of insecurity. This radical, irrational form of optimism perceives possibility in embracing the worst. Rosalind's father, previously usurped from his dukedom and exiled by his brother, will similarly look upon the space of the forest as one of freedom: "Are not these woods / More free from peril than the envious court?" (2.1.4–5). Over the course of the play, we encounter a number of other exiled subjects, including not only Rosalind's father, Duke Senior, but also Duke Senior's lords; as well as Orlando (exiled by his older brother, Oliver); Adam (Oliver's servant who accompanies Orlando); Duke Frederick and Oliver (who willingly enter exile at the end of the play); and Jaques (first exiled with Duke Senior's other lords, and ultimately self-exiled). As Joseph Turner suggests in his contribution to this volume, many of these characters experience the exiled space of the Forest of Arden as a "school" for the cultivation of empathy and

¹⁰ Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, New Folger Library edition, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Simon and Schuster, 2004).

communal virtue. Turner demonstrates how Rosalind, in particular, learns how to understand others' suffering by putting herself in their positions (*ethopoeia*), which enables her to empathize with the love-stricken Orlando, as well as with Silvius and Phoebe. But what is also striking about the forest, and more particularly about the space and condition of exile, is how it enables a number of characters to form new bonds that serve as the basis for individual and communal flourishing. When loosened from the strictures of their previous world, these characters create relationships that are dictated not by compulsion or predetermined hierarchies, but rather that are born of freewill, mutual consent, respect, and love.

In fact, many of the relationships that form in the space of exile ignore or even invert the relationships established by the terms and social hierarchies of the court – enabling the characters to grow in new ways and opening up new possibilities for communal flourishing. While Rosalind and Celia shared a loving bond prior to Rosalind's exile, their bond deepens when they are released from the political freight of their filial obligations and their subjugation to Celia's father. Their new identities, disguised as the male Ganymede and his poor sister Aliena, free them to enjoy an unencumbered bond of friendship and love. As Sean Keilen argues in his chapter on "friendship," Shakespeare often rejects Cicero's model that limits friendship to men who share an equal status, demonstrating the deep reaches of female friendship as well as the ways that bonds of love and loyalty can transcend the artificial barriers of social inequality or political determinations. In *As You Like It*, we see this also in the forging of a loving bond between Orlando and his brother's former servant Adam, both of whom demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice for the other when faced with the most dire of circumstances. When Adam collapses from starvation and exhaustion, Orlando cajoles him with a message of hopeful optimism – "Live a little, comfort a little, cheer thyself a little" (2.6.5–6) – and vows to him, "If this uncouth forest yield anything savage, I will either be food for it or bring it food for thee" (2.6.6–7). Stumbling upon the feast of Duke Senior and his lords, Orlando expects to have to use force to obtain a share in their food, having assumed that "all things had been savage here," but is instead greeted with a kind welcome and generous invitation to partake in their bounty (2.7.112). The experience moves him to shift his perspective and to understand that something he assumed to be improbable, or even impossible, might in fact be possible in this world. As William West has observed, "The play drives forward ... towards future ways of life that are not merely different but can be made different, and made better, than

previous ones.”¹¹ Witnessing an unexpected shift, Orlando comes to appreciate a new understanding of the world’s potentiality. And indeed, his own feelings and actions have already demonstrated this to be the case, as illustrated by Orlando’s refusal to partake in Duke Senior’s meal before retrieving Adam, whom he carries on his back. This inversion of the master-servant relationship reveals a truer bond between human beings who struggle together to survive and to serve one another.

Jaques’s analogy between the “world” and the “stage” observes the superficiality of the roles that people tend to play in their lives on earth, which are dictated by the conditions of one’s birth and fortunes:

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. (2.7.146–150)

This description of ongoing human “exits” and “entrances” in the world and the division of a single man’s lifespan into “seven ages,” a corollary to “parts” and “stages,” compares the ephemerality of human life to that of performance. It suggests that the different “parts” a man plays in his lifetime are temporary performances – *secular*, in that they are *of this world* and thus temporal – rather than essential manifestations of who we are as human beings. While these roles may hold great sway over our lives, particularly when they dictate status and privilege, or our position within a hierarchized society, they hold no intrinsic meaning. *As You Like It* seems to recognize the superficiality of these earthly roles in its willingness to question and subvert them in order to allow deeper and more consensual bonds to form. By the same token, the play unflinchingly demonstrates how certain roles – for example, positions of political power or those dictated by the patriarchal system of primogeniture – might lend themselves to corruption and abuses, leading to tyranny and enmity between brothers. Divested of these roles, a former duke (recast as an “outlaw” in the space of the forest) can invite a hungry “stranger” (who unbeknownst to him, is the son of his good friend) to dine at his table. While many of the characters in the play forge deeper bonds by escaping their worldly roles, a character like Jaques seems to opt out of forming human bonds altogether, perhaps finding the unadulterated fellowship that he craves only to be accessible in the suffering of animals.

¹¹ William N. West, *As If: Essays in As You Like It* (Dead Letter Office: Babel Working Group, 2016), 17.

The play in fact considers the possibility of making a place for the flourishing of animals in its new community of relationships. Describing his sense of responsibility towards Adam as “like a doe, [who goes] to find [her] fawn / And give it food,” Orlando unwittingly draws a connection to the sympathy that the Duke and his lords feel for the deer whom they kill to supply their feast. Duke Senior questions the ethics of such an ecosystem when he says that it “irks” him that “the poor dappled fools, / Being native burgher of this desert city, / Should in their own confines with forked heads / Have their round haunches gored” (2.1.22–25). His First Lord responds with a story of observing Jaques’s lament as he in turn observes the suffering of “a poor sequestered stag” who has been mortally wounded by a hunter’s bullet. The deer, he says, “heaved forth such groans / That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat / Almost to bursting” and at the same time “big round tears / Coursed one another down his innocent nose” (2.1.37–40). Jaques, in turn, is brought to tears. The multilayered scene of observation through which Duke Senior becomes witness to the deer’s physical suffering awakens his sense of the shared bodily vulnerability and capacity for pain that unites all living beings. Just as Orlando questions the hierarchy that would prevent his recognition of the hunger and fellow humanity of a servant, the Duke questions the ecosystem of the forest that provides one being’s sustenance at the expense of another’s suffering and life, and considers the possibility of extending communal values and rights to the nonhuman beings with whom they coexist. The play only goes so far in this regard: empathy for the deer can only be imagined by ascribing to it the anthropomorphic capacity of crying, and the human characters go on to enjoy their venison feast. While Duke Senior is moved to recognize upon learning of Adam’s suffering that “... we are not all alone unhappy / This wide and universal theater / Presents more woeful pageants than the scene / Wherein we play in” (142–145), his willingness to heed a wider world of suffering by ameliorating Adam’s hunger comes at the deer’s expense. Human bonds ultimately trump the needs or ability of other lives to flourish, as further illustrated by Orlando’s killing of a lion to save his brother’s life, an act of sacrifice that compels Oliver’s conversion to brotherly affection. Whereas the play draws a line at the idea of a human being remaining in a home that resembles a “butchery,” it allows the forest to be turned into such for the “greasy citizens” who are its native inhabitants. In this way, the play’s ethics may be seen to accord with what Nussbaum deems to be “the general anthropocentrism of Aristotle’s ethical method,” which “ranks lives” within a “cosmic hierarchy,” though in another way it may be possible to conclude that both Aristotle and

Shakespeare prioritize an understanding of world that subordinates the significance of individual beings and lives to a broader eco-system, whose flourishing might entail the need for responsible hunting.¹²

But even if we accept the view of a flourishing world whose sustainability depends on killing, the forest of *As You Like It* is decidedly not a perfect utopia. Characters' actions are sometimes motivated by trickery rather than consent. Orlando is deceived by Rosalind's disguise and reveals his love to her under false pretenses, and Phoebe is tricked into marrying Silvius. Not everyone is equally integrated into the new communal world that begins to form and it is clear that class and gender hierarchies will persist to some extent. When Rosalind receives a love letter from Phoebe, she protests that it could not have been written by her because it is "a man's invention" (4.3.32). Exclaiming, "She defies me / Like Turk to Christian. Women's gentle brain / Could not drop forth such giant-rude invention, / Such Ethiop words, blacker in their effect / Than in their countenance," Rosalind describes the unwomanly style of the letter in racialized and religious terms of abuse (4.3.35–39). In this way, she demonstrates her ready access to a larger world of difference far beyond the confines of Arden and even France – a world whose differences are automatically transposed by Rosalind into racist stereotypes of deception and foulness. These judgments are in turn part of the fabric of the new communal world of Arden, which for all its inclusivity is ultimately quite homogenous and bounded by intolerance. The racialized "hand" ascribed to the letter in fact bleeds into Rosalind's description of Phoebe's actual physical hand, which Rosalind describes as "leathern" and "a freestone-colored hand," adding "I verily did think / That her old gloves were on, but 'twas her hands" (4.3.27–29). It is with such remarkable ease that a racialized sense of skin color, informed by the geopolitics of a newly globalizing world seeps into the domestic construction of class and gender.

Can such a small-minded integration of the world beyond lead to a better world? Perhaps it is no wonder that Jaques adopts a position of willful unbelonging and an attitude of pessimism – not just toward the world of the court but perhaps toward all worlds, whose first blush of optimism turns out to be rather cruel.¹³ Describing his "melancholy" disposition as the result of "the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which

¹² Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 373.

¹³ As Lauren Berlant has argued, "cruel optimism" results from an attachment to "compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic." *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 24.

rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness,” Jaques bases his point of view on his accumulated perceptions of the world (4.I.20–22). As he concisely explains to Rosalind, “I have gained my experience” (4.I.28). But in another sense, his pessimism need not constitute a complete rejection of world in the fullest sense of the world’s potentiality. Jaques’s decision to remain at Arden at the end of the play suggests that perhaps he has even found a place for his pessimism in this world of exile. The very possibility illustrates the pluralistic capacity of world as well as its dynamism and worlding potential – a potential that encompasses both doing and undoing. Could pessimism be a form of potentiality? Could it be the basis for posing the question: *What if the world were other than it is?* Does it lead to the process of re-worlding? West observes how “[b]y exploring the ways the world can be different than it is, the characters of *As You Like It* strive to make the world a place in which they can be at home, not as a utopia ... but as an ongoing work of living.”¹⁴ As Rosalind, Orlando, and Duke Senior return to the world of the court, Frederick, Oliver, and (presumably) Celia will join Jaques in creating a new home in the world of the forest. Both worlds will be irrevocably altered. What futures will unfold are entirely unknowable, and somehow the very certainty of this unknowability provides some measure of reassurance. We have every reason to believe that these worlds will keep on worlding. A world is a world because it is never perfect or complete, but always striving. Is there any greater source of virtue than this?

¹⁴ West, *As If*, 31.