

# EDWARD SOJA'S THIRD SPACE THEORY IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S AS YOU LIKE IT

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## ABSTRACT

The application of Edward Soja's Third Space Theory to William Shakespeare's pastoral comedy "As You Like It." Third Space Theory, which emphasizes the intersection of physical, social, and imagined spaces, provides a novel lens through which to analyse the spatial dynamics within the play. By examining the Forest of Arden as a 'Third Space,' this study reveals how characters navigate and negotiate their identities and social relations beyond the constraints of the court. The fluid and hybrid nature of the Forest facilitates a transformative experience for the characters, enabling them to reconfigure their social roles and personal identities. This paper argues that Shakespeare's depiction of Arden serves as a critical commentary on the possibilities of social reformation and personal liberation within an alternative spatial framework. Through a close reading of key scenes, the analysis highlights how the play's spatial politics reflect and challenge contemporary notions of space, identity, and power.

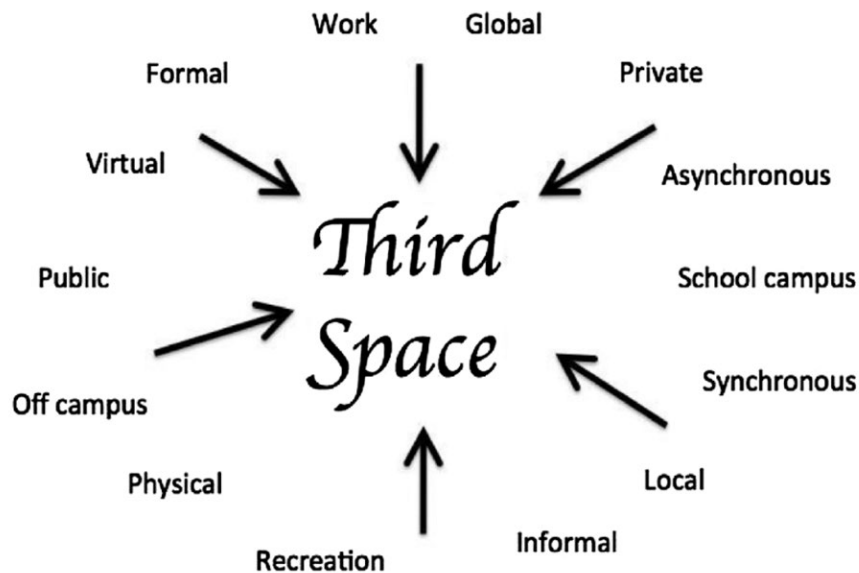
**Keywords:** Edward Soja, Third Space Theory, William Shakespeare, as You Like it, Forest of Arden, Spatial Dynamics, Identity Transformation, Social Relations, Liminality, Hybridity

## 1. INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is a pastoral comedy that delves deeply into themes of identity, transformation, and social dynamics within the contrasting settings of the court and the Forest of Arden. One compelling lens through which to examine these themes is Edward Soja's Third Space Theory. Soja, a critical theorist and urban geographer, posits that the concept of 'Third Space' represents a hybrid, transformative space where conventional binaries and fixed identities are transcended, allowing for new forms of social relations and cultural practices to emerge. This theoretical framework provides a rich avenue for exploring the complex interactions and fluid identities in *As You Like It*, particularly as characters navigate the socially constructed boundaries of the court and the forest.

In *As You Like It*, the Forest of Arden serves as a quintessential Third Space, a liminal zone where the rigid hierarchies and social norms of court life are suspended, and characters are free to explore and reconstruct their identities. The pastoral setting becomes a site of possibility and renewal, offering a counterpoint to the constraints of the court. Through Soja's Third Space Theory, we can see how Shakespeare uses the forest to challenge and subvert traditional notions of

power, gender, and social order. This analysis will illuminate how the interplay between the structured court and the liberating forest creates a dynamic space for character development and thematic exploration, underscoring the play's enduring relevance to discussions of identity and social change.



## 2. literature review

Soja's Third Space Theory, articulated in works such as *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), posits that Third Space is a lived space where conventional boundaries are blurred, allowing for the emergence of new, hybrid identities and social practices. This concept challenges the binary oppositions of the First Space (the physical, material world) and the Second Space (the realm of ideas and representations), proposing instead a space that is both real and imagined, physical and metaphorical. In the context of *As You Like It*, the Forest of Arden serves as this transformative Third Space, contrasting with the oppressive structures of the court. Scholars like David Galbraith (2002) and Susan Baker (2007) have explored the forest's role in enabling characters to experiment with and redefine their identities, thus aligning with Soja's conceptual framework.

The forest's capacity to serve as a site of identity transformation is evident in the experiences of key characters such as Rosalind and Orlando. In the court, Rosalind is constrained by her status and gender, but in the Forest of Arden, she assumes the male disguise of Ganymede, exploring a fluidity of identity and gaining agency. This act of cross-dressing, analyzed by critics like Jean E. Howard (1994), not only subverts traditional gender roles but also embodies the creation of a Third Space where fixed identities are questioned and reconfigured. Orlando, similarly, undergoes a transformation as he moves from a disgruntled younger son to a romantic hero, finding his voice and self-assurance in the forest's liberating environment. These character arcs highlight the forest as a space where social norms are suspended, allowing for personal and relational growth.

the forest as a Third Space facilitates the formation of new social dynamics and communities. According to Michael Hattaway (2000), the exiled Duke Senior and his followers recreate a pastoral community that contrasts sharply with the political intrigue and corruption of the court. This community, based on egalitarian principles and mutual support, represents an idealized form of social organization that challenges the hierarchies and power structures of the court. The pastoral setting, therefore, serves not merely as a backdrop but as a catalyst for envisioning alternative social arrangements. In Soja's terms, the forest becomes a space where new social practices and relationships can be imagined and enacted, offering a critique of existing power dynamics.

the interplay between the court and the forest underscores the permeability and fluidity of Soja's Third Space. Critics like Phyllis Rackin (1990) have noted that characters frequently move between these spaces, carrying with them

influences from both worlds. This movement highlights the interconnectedness of spaces and the potential for transformation and hybridity. The forest does not exist in isolation but in a dynamic relationship with the court, reflecting Soja's idea that Third Space is a site of ongoing negotiation and interaction between different spatial dimensions. This fluidity is evident in the play's resolution, where characters return to the court with newfound insights and transformed identities, suggesting that the boundaries between First, Second, and Third Spaces are continually being redrawn.

### 3. The Concept of Third Space

Soja's Third Space Theory challenges binary oppositions and fixed identities, proposing instead a space of hybridity and fluidity. It represents a departure from traditional understandings of space as purely physical or metaphorical, offering a conceptual tool to analyze how spaces can reshape social relations and identities. In *As You Like It*, the Forest of Arden embodies this theory by creating a setting where characters undergo profound transformations away from the constraints of the court.

#### 1) The Forest of Arden as a Third Space

- **Subversion of Social Norms**

The Forest of Arden disrupts traditional hierarchies and social norms established in the court. Here, Duke Senior and his followers, including Rosalind and Orlando, live in exile. This exile blurs the distinctions between nobility and commoners, creating an egalitarian space where social hierarchies lose their significance. The forest becomes a refuge from the rigid structures of the court, enabling characters to explore alternative ways of living and relating to one another.

- **Fluidity of Identity**

Arden facilitates the exploration of fluid identities, particularly through Rosalind's transformation into Ganymede. Disguised as a young man, Rosalind navigates her identity in ways impossible in the court. Her disguise challenges conventional gender roles and allows her to interact with Orlando on more equal terms. This fluidity extends beyond gender, encompassing various facets of identity such as social status and personal agency, all of which are renegotiated in the liberating space of Arden.

- **Reconfiguration of Relationships**

Relationships in Arden evolve in contrast to those in the court. The camaraderie among exiled courtiers and the budding romance between Rosalind/Ganymede and Orlando reflect a more spontaneous and less structured social dynamic. Friendships and love connections form organically, free from the political calculations and formalities of court life. Arden thus becomes a stage where relationships are redefined, highlighting the transformative potential of a Third Space in reshaping social interactions.

#### 2) Character Transformations in Arden

- **Rosalind/Ganymede**

Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede exemplifies the transformative power of Arden. As Ganymede, Rosalind not only explores alternative gender identities but also exercises agency over her fate. She guides Orlando in the art of love while simultaneously negotiating her own desires and emotions. Through this disguise, Rosalind challenges societal expectations and asserts her independence, illustrating how the Third Space of Arden empowers characters to transcend restrictive norms and forge their own paths.

- **Duke Senior**

Duke Senior's transformation in Arden contrasts sharply with his previous role as a political figure in the court. Here, he embraces a philosophy of contentment and simplicity, finding solace in nature and the company of his fellow exiles. His character evolution underscores the freedom that Arden offers from the power struggles and intrigues of the court. By

relinquishing his title and status, Duke Senior discovers a deeper sense of fulfillment, symbolizing the liberation that comes from inhabiting a Third Space where societal pressures are momentarily suspended.

- **Touchstone and Audrey**

The relationship between Touchstone, the court jester, and Audrey, the shepherdess, exemplifies the blending of social boundaries in Arden. Touchstone's courtly wit meets Audrey's rustic charm, resulting in a playful courtship that defies conventional distinctions between classes. Their interaction underscores the fluidity of social roles in Arden, where identities are not fixed but negotiated through personal interactions and mutual affection. Touchstone and Audrey's romance thus illustrates how the Third Space of Arden encourages characters to transcend social constraints and embrace unconventional relationships.

## **4. Reintegration and the Impact of the Third Space**

The final act of *As You Like It* marks a significant juncture where characters return from the liberating environment of the Forest of Arden to the structured confines of the court.

### **1) Transformation of Social Norms and Hierarchies**

In Arden, the characters experience a suspension of traditional social hierarchies and norms. Duke Senior, who was displaced from his position of power in the court, embraces a simpler, more contemplative life in the forest. His return to the court, therefore, reflects a changed perspective on authority and leadership. No longer solely defined by his title, Duke Senior brings back a wisdom gained from his time in Arden, challenging the rigid structures of the court with a newfound humility and understanding of the broader human experience beyond courtly politics.

Similarly, Rosalind's transformation into Ganymede allows her to explore and assert her agency in ways unimaginable within the court. As Ganymede, she not only navigates the complexities of love with Orlando but also dispenses wisdom and guidance to those around her. Her return to the court as Rosalind thus signifies not just a change in appearance but a deeper awareness of her capabilities and desires. This transformation challenges gender roles and expectations within the court, potentially opening up avenues for greater individual freedom and expression among its members.

### **2) Redefinition of Relationships**

The relationships forged and developed in Arden carry significant implications for the characters' reintegration into courtly life. In the forest, the bonds between Duke Senior and his exiled companions, including those from different social strata, reflect a camaraderie and mutual respect often absent in the court's stratified environment. Their return to the court challenges the exclusivity of courtly relationships, advocating for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to social interactions.

Rosalind and Orlando's love story, nurtured in Arden under the guise of Ganymede, transcends the superficialities of courtship rituals and hierarchical expectations. Their reunion in the court thus symbolizes a union based on mutual understanding and emotional depth, rather than societal approval or familial alliances alone. By celebrating their love openly despite initial obstacles, Rosalind and Orlando embody a challenge to the court's rigid conventions regarding romance and marriage, paving the way for greater personal agency and authenticity in their relationship.

### **3) Impact on Personal Identity and Agency**

Arden serves as a catalyst for characters to explore and assert their identities outside the constraints of courtly expectations. Rosalind's transformation into Ganymede not only allows her to navigate the complexities of love and desire but also grants her agency in shaping her own narrative. Upon her return to the court, Rosalind brings back the confidence and self-awareness gained from her time in the forest, challenging societal norms regarding gender roles and asserting her right to determine her own fate.

Similarly, Touchstone's relationship with Audrey, born out of mutual affection rather than social status, challenges the court's notions of love and marriage. Their interactions in Arden highlight the fluidity of social roles and the potential for personal growth beyond prescribed identities. Their reintegration into courtly life thus underscores a broader acceptance of diverse expressions of love and companionship, challenging the court's rigid hierarchy and advocating for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to social relationships.

#### 4) Potential for Lasting Change

The characters' experiences in Arden fundamentally alter their perceptions of themselves and their place within society, offering a blueprint for lasting change in the court's social structure. Duke Senior's return with a renewed perspective on leadership and community sets a precedent for a more compassionate and inclusive governance. His willingness to embrace diversity and collaborate with individuals from varied backgrounds signifies a departure from the hierarchical power struggles characteristic of the court.

Rosalind and Orlando's union challenges the court's patriarchal norms and advocates for a more egalitarian approach to love and marriage. By celebrating their relationship openly and on their own terms, they pave the way for greater personal autonomy and emotional fulfillment within courtly life. Their example encourages other courtiers to reconsider their own roles and relationships, fostering a more progressive and compassionate social environment.

### 5. Conclusion

the forest of Arden functions as a liminal space where traditional boundaries dissolve, allowing characters to explore alternative identities and relationships. Soja's concept of Thirdspace emphasizes the fluidity and hybridity of identities that emerge in such spaces. In *As You Like It*, characters like Rosalind and Orlando, among others, find themselves liberated from the rigid roles and expectations of the court. Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, navigates her identity in a playful and transformative manner, challenging conventional gender norms and exploring different facets of her personality. This exploration is facilitated by the freedom offered by the forest, which encourages personal growth and self-discovery.

Moreover, the forest of Arden serves as a site of encounter and exchange between characters from different social backgrounds, enabling the formation of new relationships and alliances. Soja argues that third spaces foster dialogue and negotiation between diverse groups, thereby challenging dominant power structures. In *As You Like It*, the interactions between shepherds, courtiers, and nobles in the forest illustrate this dynamic. The egalitarian nature of the forest allows for a temporary suspension of hierarchical distinctions, creating opportunities for genuine human connection and understanding.

Furthermore, Soja's Third Space Theory underscores the importance of spatiality in shaping social relations and power dynamics. In *As You Like It*, the contrast between the oppressive court and the liberating forest highlights how physical environments influence characters' behavior and choices. The forest represents a space of autonomy and agency, where characters can renegotiate their identities and aspirations outside the confines of conventional society. This renegotiation is exemplified in Rosalind's interactions with Orlando, where their love develops more authentically and deeply in the natural setting of Arden.

In conclusion, Edward Soja's Third Space Theory enriches our understanding of *As You Like It* by illuminating the significance of spatiality, identity, and social dynamics within the play. The forest of Arden functions as a transformative third space where characters experience liberation, self-discovery, and the forging of new relationships. Soja's emphasis on hybridity and fluidity in third spaces resonates with the complexities of Shakespeare's characters as they navigate issues of love, identity, and power. By exploring these themes through the lens of Third space, we gain a deeper appreciation of how Shakespeare challenges and transcends traditional boundaries, inviting us to reconsider the ways in which spaces shape human experiences and interactions. Thus, *As You Like It* not only entertains but also provokes reflection on the dynamic interplay between physical environments and the construction of personal and social identities.

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