Interpreting the Sacred in *As You Like It*: Reading the "Book of Nature" from a Christian, Ecocritical Perspective

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INTERPRETING THE SACRED IN AS YOU LIKE IT: READING THE “BOOK OF NATURE” FROM A CHRISTIAN, ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

INTERPRETING THE SACRED IN *AS YOU LIKE IT*: READING THE “BOOK OF NATURE” FROM A CHRISTIAN, ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Since the advent of the environmental crisis, some writers have raised concerns with the moral influence of Christian scripture and interpretive traditions, such as the medieval book of nature, a hermeneutic in which nature and scripture are “read” in reference to one another. Scripture, they argue, has tended to stifle sacred relationships with nature as a non-human other. This thesis argues that such perspectives are reductive of the sacred quality of scripture. Environmental perspectives should be concerned with the desacralization of religious texts in addition to nature. Chapter one suggests that two questions surrounding the medieval book of nature’s history can help us address ways that such perspectives reduce religious interpretation of sacred texts. The first question is the tension between manifestation and proclamation, or the question of how scripture and nature reveal sacred meanings. The second is the problem of evil, or
the question of where evil and suffering come from. It also proposes that
Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and religious philosophy, particularly Paul
Ricoeur’s writings, can help us address these problems and provide a
contemporary religious perspective of the “book of nature.” Drawing on scenes in
the play in which nature is “read” as a book and Ricoeur’s essay on
“Manifestation and Proclamation,” chapter two argues how manifestation often
works interdependently with proclamation. Chapter three discusses how
anthropocentric worldviews in which natural entities are exploited also distort
interpretive relationships with scripture. Overcoming desacralization requires
giving up desires to suppress contingencies, particularly suffering, in nature and
in interpreting religious texts. Only as the characters in *As You Like It* accept
contingencies are they able to engage hidden sources of hope, which is
comparable to the need to let go of mastery in interpretation Ricoeur describes.
Chapter four discusses problems with attempts to uncover the origins of the
environmental crisis by discussing what Ricoeur writes about the problems with
theodicy and Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology of evil. Assumptions that
specific human origins for evil can be blamed confirm deceptively human-
centered worldviews and can mask valuable messages about how to morally
respond to suffering that are taught in Judeo-Christian narratives.
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The Problem of the “Book of Nature”

In the medieval period, there was a hermeneutic called *liber naturae* or the “book of nature” that had been theorized by Christian theologians in late antiquity. As the creation of God, nature was considered analogous to His written words and capable of revealing His purposes. Nature and scripture were considered “two books” of divine revelation intended to be interpreted side-by-side. The possible meanings of each “text” expanded through this relationship, producing endless insights (Dupré 37). This mode of biblical exegesis peaked during the twelfth-century, but then diminished toward the late medieval era (Otten 267-83). However, the memory of this tradition lived on. In many subsequent eras, religious groups, scientists, and others have drawn on the analogy to promote faith in the power of human reason to unfold God’s mysteries (Harrison 6), to argue that no human theory can compare to God’s great “book of nature” (Harrison 15-18), and at other times to reconnect readings of scripture with nature (Numbers 261-63).

In the context of the contemporary environmental crisis, medieval traditions that encompass the book of nature are sometimes remembered in a negative light. The most famous example of this is found in Lynn White’s essay, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” which identifies the Bible and medieval exegesis as sources of the West’s anthropocentricism and indifference to the natural world. The Judeo-Christian hermeneutic between nature and scripture, White and others have suggested, is what initially led the West to let language and
reasoning dominate over any sense of the sacred in nature, making contemporary
culture deaf to nature’s moral claims. Three publications I will draw on in my
argument are White’s essay, Christopher Manes’s “Nature and Silence,” and
David Abram’s *Spell of the Sensuous*. These environmental perspectives are
concerned with currents needs for the West to reconnect with a sense of sacred in
nature that would help improve moral practice. The solutions they propose look to
the kind of experience animistic cultures had (before book religions) to deter
anthropocentric language and are critical of religious textual interpretation.
However, they overlook important questions about what it means to interpret
scripture as a sacred text. In my argument, I will build on the assumption that one
of the distinctive traits that defines the sacred is its presentation of itself as at least
partially *non-human*, or irreducible to human-derived meanings. By this
definition, the sacred appears irreconcilable with anthropocentrism; it seems
illogical that something non-human and yet held in spiritual reverence by humans
would be immorally human-centered. Sensing the sacred in nature, as Manes,
Abram, and other environmental thinkers have suggested, involves recognizing
and engaging its otherness, its own “voice,” which helps to deter immorally
human-centered worldviews (Manes 15-17; Abram 91-92). Because it claims to
be partially other-than-human, scripture offers meanings that may similarly deter
immoral anthropocentrism. Yet, if scriptural language may potentially perform
the same function as the sacred quality of nature, what does it mean to criticize
Judeo-Christian scripture and interpretive practice as anthropocentric? Two
questions that have long been associated with the book of nature can help us explore this problem.

The first concerns what Paul Ricoeur calls the tension between “manifestation” and “proclamation” (encompassed in the distinction between “religious” or “holy” and “sacred”), which raises the question, what is the relationship between how the divine manifests itself in nature and how it is revealed in scripture? As Ricoeur explains in his essay “Manifestation and Proclamation” published in *Figuring the Sacred*, Judeo-Christian faith has struggled with this problem since Hebraic civilization (55-56). Proclamation is a “hermeneutic … where the accent is placed on speech and writing, and generally on the word of God,” and in which interpretation, including building on the readings of past generations, is central (48). In contrast, manifestation refers to hierophanies or sensory encounters with the sacred in nature. Manifestation initially has little to do with language, although language becomes involved later as the experience is interpreted (49). As Ricoeur describes, it is possible to distinguish manifestation from proclamation in such a way that the two appear irreconcilable. Religious texts or a sacred sense of nature prevails, leading to either a nature-centered or scripture-centered worldview (48, 55-56).

Environmental perspectives sometimes appear to polarize nature from scripture by assuming scripture has eclipsed the sacred in nature. However, Ricoeur argues, scripture and nature are intended to work through harmonious relationships in which both scriptural language and the natural world reveal sacred meanings that shape our relationships. Distinctions between proclamation and the sacred in
nature collapse in the sense that manifestation and proclamation are both ways of engaging divine meanings (Ricoeur 65-67).

The second question concerning the sacred nature of scripture is the problem of evil, or, if God created the world and God is good, how is it that He allowed or willed evil and suffering to enter it? In late antiquity, Gnostic groups perceived Judeo-Christian scripture and the God of the Old Testament as flawed and not sacred in the sense Christians believed. They asserted that the presence of adversities in nature disproved Christian claims that the earth and scripture are of divine origin. The book of nature was conceptualized partly as a means of defending the Judeo-Christian faith. Origen, Basil and Augustine wrote of how when nature and scripture are interpreted side by side, divine grace is perceptible in the midst of evil and suffering. Ironically, while the book of nature began as a means of understanding how scripture helps us to understand and accept suffering, environmental perspectives sometimes treat such interpretive traditions as if they are sources of moral evil and suffering in the natural world. The history of the book of nature suggests how the way we theorize the problem of evil shapes our perceptions of religious texts’ capacities to reveal divine meanings. We can extend lessons from late antiquity to criticisms of medieval exegesis. If scripture is treated partially as a source of moral evil in the environmental crisis (not unlike Gnostics in late antiquity believed both nature and the Old Testament were flawed and unfit for their spiritual engagement), this may eclipse reception of sacred meanings that would help us to live in greater harmony with the natural world.
This introductory chapter will argue that the exclusion of these two questions from environmental discussion of Christian interpretive traditions is a reduction of scripture as text that can aid us in engaging sacred meanings in nature. This reduction is comparable not only to Gnostic assumptions about Judeo-Christian scripture and evil in late antiquity, but also to re-conceptualizations of scripture and nature during the early modern era. During the beginning of the modern era, interest in the connections between divine words and creation diminished. Engagement of the phenomenological world became more grounded in reason’s capacities to make nature intelligible rather than in beliefs that divine meanings and purposes are concealed within the natural world. Science began to be applied to technology in order to take greater control over human suffering. Whether for good or ill, such shifts led Western perceptions of what it means to interpret religious texts and nature in more human-centered directions.

The danger of reducing the two questions I have raised concerning the sacred quality of scripture in environmental criticisms is that doing so may deceive us into inadvertently confirming technological worldviews. Modern technology is correlated not only with failure to sense the sacred in nature, but also to engage sacred meanings in scripture. The lack of a strong sense of “contingency” and a desire for “transparency,” evident in contemporary science and technology, diminishes concern with the question of “the precinct of grace” and “God’s presence in our world” Our loss of contingency, especially in relation to suffering, distances us from the West’s religious traditions in addition to the
natural world (Borgmann 65-66, 78-79, 85-89). If we wish to overturn anthropocentrism, we should be concerned not only with the loss of sacred meanings in nature, but also with the desacralization of the religious or holy. Criticisms of Christian traditions may also be understood as inadvertently affirming technological assumptions about evil and its sources. It is partly by treating suffering as having causes that are to be identified and repressed that Western culture exploits the natural world. Searching for and accusing specific sources of the moral evils of the environmental crisis may only uphold such conceptualizations of how to appropriately respond to suffering and evil.

This thesis will offer a religious perspective of the “book of nature” as it concerns the environmental crisis, the tension between proclamation and manifestation, and the problem of evil. My argument will be based primarily on an ecocritical approach to the questions I have raised. William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* carries special significance in the context of environmental perspectives of medieval religious traditions. Shakespeare lived in a culture that was transitioning from a medieval to a modern world, and in which there were conflicting views on whether and how nature should be “read” in reference to scripture and emerging scientific discourses. Discussion of the medieval book of nature had drawn interest during his time, and Shakespeare alludes to the tradition throughout the play. The play is also thematically relevant to the problem of evil. While working within pastoral conventions, Shakespeare overthrows idyllicism in favor of more realistic portrayals of nature’s adversities. In some ways, the play’s scenes focus more on the consequences of Adam’s fall in the book of Genesis
than on traditional pastoral narratives. Characters’ experiences in the forest raise questions about how nature can be a source of hope when it is also a source of suffering. In addition to the problem of evil, the play explores how nature and other sources of religious wisdom, including preaching, convey sacred meanings in relation to each other.

To discuss the interpretive relationships with nature and religious meanings in the play and their relevance to an environmental perspective of Judeo-Christian traditions, I will also draw on continental religious philosophy, particularly the essays of Paul Ricoeur collected in *Figuring the Sacred*. Like *As You Like It*, Ricoeur’s essays provide paths through which to talk about both the problem of evil and the question of how religious text and the sacred convey meanings in the context of contemporary environmentalism. His arguments are conscious of the evils of Western culture and reductive interpretations from the past, but nevertheless assert that reconnecting with scripture as a sacred text can help the West better face moral questions in its future.

This thesis will argue that the “book of nature” analogy offers a meaningful way to conceptualize how sacred meanings can help us overcome the immoral worldviews and practices that have led to the environmental crisis. In this chapter, I will discuss how early Christian theologians conceptualized the analogy of the “book of nature” in relation to the tension between the holy and the sacred, and the problem of evil. To them, the “book of nature” was a means of teaching how despite evil and suffering, nature and scripture reveal sacred meanings and that scripture is a crucial means through which we perceive divine
purposes and meanings in creation. Each consecutive chapter will discuss one implication of the hermeneutic conceptualized in their writings. The second chapter will address the issue of manifestation and proclamation in the play and discuss how nature and scripture can work together to reveal sacred and moral meanings in human relationships with nature. Drawing on Ricoeur’s essay “Manifestation and Proclamation,” it will argue that in a world that has been desacralized, sometimes learning to engage religious texts as sacred may be necessary to help restore capacities to perceive our moral obligations toward natural life. The third chapter will address the implications of scripture’s capacities to reveal sacred meanings in relationship with nature. By engaging Ricoeur’s essays and Martin Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology,” it will discuss how learning to perceive sacred meanings involves becoming sensitive to the contextual and unpredictable way they unfold in the text. To interpret the sacred in nature and scripture, we need to acknowledge the contingent quality of suffering in particular to avoid reducing both scripture and the presence of suffering in the natural world. The fourth chapter will address the problem of evil in relation to the “book of nature” and environmental perspectives and argue that overcoming technological paradigms includes letting go of seeking definitive sources of evil and suffering. Judeo-Christian narratives offer special moral meanings about how to respond fully to suffering without seeking specific sources of evil to repress. Engaging scripture can help us respond fully to suffering in natural and human realms without perpetuating suffering by suppressing it. These various facets of the “book of nature” hermeneutic suggest
ways religious interpretive relationships with scripture and nature can be balanced in such a way that scripture adds a vital dimension to our relationships with nature and can serve as an important source of moral guidance and restraint as we respond to the ecological crisis.

ORIGEN

It was in the context of a discussion concerning the problem of evil and the tension between manifestation and proclamation that the book of nature was first conceptualized in the West. Theologians who drew parallels between nature and scripture such as Origen, Basil, and Augustine did so in response to Gnostic criticisms of belief in the goodness of creation and its creator and of Christian scripture in general. Gnostic thought can be characterized by three tendencies: (1) fascination with the problem of evil and tracing sources of evil and suffering, (2) “a sense of alienation and recoil from man’s environment,” and (3) a desire for esoteric knowledge with the belief that self-knowledge is saving. One of the foundational assertions of Gnostic thought was that evil suffering is traceable to supernatural or divine cause (Nock 256-57, 267).

Origen (c. 185-254), the first Christian theologian to draw parallels between nature and scripture, lived in a time of interest in and confusion about Christian scripture and its teachings about creation. Christians had just begun to teach the doctrine of ex nihilo creation and defended the sacredness of both creation and scripture, facing criticism inside and outside of Christian circles. Christians Gnostics taught that the earth was a creation of an inferior God, and
that the Old Testament testified of a God lower than Christ and God the Father (Benjamins 13-14). Since nature is flawed and was assumed to be the work of a lower God, and because the Old Testament refers to the earth’s creator, the two gods were identified as the same. Gnostic thinkers cross-referenced their “readings” of nature and their readings of the Old Testament so that the evil they perceived in nature influenced their perspectives on scripture. Their “recoil” from the suffering present in the natural environment reinforced their dislike of the Old Testament.

Perhaps because he recognized the hermeneutic that Gnostic thought drew between nature and the Old Testament, Origen drew parallels between nature and scripture in his theology. Nature is like scripture, Origen wrote, in that some parts reveal divine grace with great clarity, while others reveal it so obscurely that human weakness cannot penetrate how such features of the natural world are connected with the divine. Gnostics and other Christians resisted using allegorical applications of the Old Testament (instead, reading it literally), which contributed to their criticisms (Benjamins 13-15). However, allegorical interpretation was essential to Origen, who taught that symbolic meanings intended for readers’ benefit are found even in obscure and seemingly irrelevant passages. Recognizing allegory is necessary to discerning how the Old Testament foreshadows the redemption testified of in the new (Benjamins 15). Like scripture, the whole of nature is intended for human good, although in parts its providence is hard to discern. Those who truly accept scripture (and nature) will not find the obscurity in nature and scripture to be a barrier to their faith, but instead a means of
strengthening their perception of deep and mysterious divine truths. As Origen writes:

   But as the doctrine of providence is not at all weakened in the eyes of those who have once honestly accepted it, so neither is the divinity of Scripture, which extends to the whole of it, on account of the inability of our weakness to discover in every expression the hidden splendor of the doctrines veiled in common and unattractive phraseology. (qtd. in Benjamins 14)

Origen trusted that even those parts of nature and scripture that appear to lack all providence or those parts that involve suffering and ugliness are connected with God’s grace and purposes, even if this is in ways human eyes and minds cannot comprehend. In its first appearance as a Christian analogy, the book of nature served as a means of understanding and accepting the presence of evil and suffering in the world.

BASIL

Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379) took a similar approach as Origen as he developed a natural theology written partly in response to Manichean beliefs that evil is a power opposite and equally powerful to good. Like other Gnostics, the Manicheans believed evil was a force at work in the creation of the world. Basil also appears to respond to criticisms of Christian beliefs about creation and questions concerning apparent evil in nature (e.g. poisonous animals, etc.) (Groh 30). His solution to the problem of such adversities in nature was simple: even the
seemingly evil things are good; we must only discover the use God created them to have (Groh 29-30). Basil believed that creation theology allows readers to perceive sources of faith and the power of God’s word in nature (Groh 28, 30). Ambrose of Milan (339-397) followed in Basil’s footsteps by defending the goodness and use of even evil parts of nature. While nature was affected by the fall, he suggested, even fallen things still have their use. Ambrose also used an analogy that would often be used later in the medieval era; nature is a mirror to the divine, which otherwise cannot be seen (Groh 31).

AUGUSTINE

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) also used the “book of nature” analogy in order to respond to Manichean beliefs about the presence of evil in the world, as well as Gnostic dualistic worldviews. Augustine first used the analogy in Contra Faustum Manichaeum, a treatise arguing against the writings of Faustus, a Manichean leader in North Africa (Groh 33). Faustus’s writings argued that Christians should reject major aspects of the Old Testament and the New, including Jesus’s physical birth, his “circumcision and sacrifice,” baptism, and temptations (Drecoll 39). After reaffirming that scripture should be accepted in its entirety and arguing against the particular rejections Faustus makes, Augustine draws a parallel between nature and scripture to illustrate how problematic rejecting major aspects of scripture are (Drecoll 44-45). In Augustine’s mind, to “read” scripture is also to read God’s physical creation through the history of Christ and his people, just as to read nature is to read God’s works or words:
But once you contemplate all of creation in such a way that you recognize God as creator, and if you then dislike something that you read in the great Book of Nature, so to speak, it is better that the reason remain concealed from you as a human being, than for you to dare disapprove of anything God has created. (qtd. in Groh 33)

To Augustine, nature was full of complex manifestations of God that could only be understood through religious faith. As Dieter Groh explains Augustine’s perspective, “The ‘Book of Nature’ … is not filled with statements but with difficult signs, hieroglyphs which can be understood only by those who are able to match the statements revealed in scripture” (34). To have faith that God’s grace is present in either scripture or nature is to have faith that this grace prevails in both “texts,” even if it is not at first perceptible. Augustine used the analogy of the “book of nature” as a way to defend the possibility that suffering is not necessarily an evil that must be rejected or suppressed in nature and in religious narratives. Faustus disbelieved certain parts of scriptural narratives that witnessed that Christ was a divine embodied being who suffered. Like the view that the Christian God could not create a world where life suffers, this perspective avoids associating the divine with suffering. In contrast, Augustine’s argument appears to imply that as readers of scripture, we should accept what seems evil in nature without casting judgment on scripture or the natural world because God accepts the presence of evil and suffering Himself. This applies not only to the natural world He created, but also to suffering as a part of living in the world as evident
in Christ’s acceptance of human physical suffering and temptations. The presence of suffering in the natural world is one of the never-fully revealed meanings of the “book of nature” (although sacred meanings and purposes are revealed at times through suffering, such as in Christ’s act of atonement). Augustine’s argument may help us see why sacred texts are such a vital question as we scrutinize moral relationships with nature. Meanings that claim to come from outside humanity have power to make sacred what otherwise seems ordinary or evil, and which otherwise does not seem worthy of our respect or our restraint from suppressing.

This brief sketch of the book of nature’s origins in Christian theology suggests how closely the problem of evil and the tension between manifestation and proclamation are linked. As we contemplate the presence of evil and suffering in our world, it is not only as if we are “reading” nature as a text itself, but this also interacts with how the texts shape our phenomenological worlds as readers. A simplified version of the “reading” of the early critics of the Bible and Christian belief in the goodness of creation is that because suffering is part of both the natural and phenomenological world, and the world portrayed in narratives of the Old Testament, neither the readers’ world nor the world of the text can reveal divine meanings. Origen’s, Basil’s and Augustine’s responses reflect opposite beliefs about suffering. All things have their purpose according to the divine. Suffering does not prevent nature from revealing the divine or sacred meanings, and may even serve as a way of revealing sacred meanings and purposes. Nature is comparable to a mirror reflecting God’s face, or a book written with his hand.
According to these early theologians, the analogy of the “book of nature” suggests two things about the problem of evil and the tension between manifestation and proclamation: (1) that despite the evil and suffering present in nature, God’s grace is manifest in nature, even, at times, in things that appear evil themselves, and (2) that human capacities to perceive this grace are increased by scripture. Written sacred texts do not carry stagnant meanings, but meanings that have potential to revitalize purposes we perceive in our relationships with the natural world.

In the medieval era, interpretive relationships with nature and scripture became closely intertwined. This tradition would eventually diminish. However, attempts to reconcile scripture with the presence of evil did not end. The book of nature’s relevance to the problem of evil and the tension between proclamation and manifestation continues to be apparent in perspectives of the Bible’s influence on the environmental crisis.

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES OF THE “BOOK OF NATURE”
As some environmental writers have addressed the Bible and medieval exegesis, they have raised these problems in our time with two questions: (1) how can we understand the Bible, a text that claims to be sacred, when it can now be questioned whether its influence was for good or evil in relationship to the natural world, and, (2) how can we make sense of the evil and suffering occurring in our world created through the explosion of technology? In his 1967 article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. argues that despite the
dwindling of Christian faith in Western culture, the West continues to hold to readings of the Bible, particularly the counsel to “subdue” the earth in the Genesis creation account. White also blames medieval natural theology, arguing that it is the direct ancestor of modern science. The belief that nature could reveal the divine like a book combined with the idea that creation is for man’s use, he claims, led to the idea that scientists should seek to unravel God’s mysteries in nature and use their discoveries to benefit mankind (188-91). White proposes that the West needs a new religion, or at least to drastically rework its religious traditions (193).

Christopher Manes also identifies the book of nature as a foundation for attitudes that caused the environmental crisis. The influence of medieval exegesis, Manes claims, promoted Renaissance humanistic anthropocentricism, the main culprit of the silencing the voice of nature in modern culture (19-21). Medieval natural theology imposed reductive meanings on natural life so that the latter became merely an extension of the biblical text. An eagle, for example, was reduced to a mere symbol for Saint John. As Manes describes, “Exegesis swept all into the net of divine meaning,” usually linking symbols in nature with human salvation (19). Religious and secular texts dominated over meanings in nature, destroying manifestations of natural meanings with anthropocentric language. Manes suggests that if we are to emulate a medieval tradition today, it should be the contemplative tradition, which he perceives as creating a more genuine dialogue with nature, if only because words were more sparse (25-6).
David Abram similarly perceives relationships with biblical text as having overpowered the authentic voice of nature. Abram theorizes that the Hebrews once had some sense of the sacredness of nature in their use of the alphabet and written texts, specifically through how they understood air, breath and wind through the word *ruach*. The Hebrew language did not contain vowels, leaving gaps to be filled with the reader’s breath, which like the wind and divine breath, were considered sacred. *Ruach*, or breath, filled the gaps in human language, providing a sacred connection between human life, wind, and the divine (239-43). However, over time, even this sense of the sacredness of the air was lost as vowels were added to the alphabet (250-51). Christianity, with its New Testament written in Greek, de-animated nature as it spread (253-54). Written scripture gradually replaced nature’s sacredness in Western culture. Beyond ancient Hebraic culture, in animistic cultures, the sounds of words and their meanings were once interwoven into the sensuous experience of nature, but once words were written, this connection between the natural world and living words was severed (140-41, 183-85). The West ceased to care about the cleanliness of the air, the natural courses of rivers, or to value the lives of animals. Abram suggests that individuals in Western culture need to reconnect with the personal, embodied experience of living in nature and create new narratives like the ones oral cultures used to help reconnect our identities and our personal moral practice to the land (269-74).
RETHINKING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Each of these arguments is concerned with understanding the problem of suffering in nature, as well as the tension between how the sacred reveals itself in nature and texts. However, they stand in strong opposition to those of the early Christian theologians who helped develop the analogy between nature and the sacred text and the interpretive tradition of both. This raises a difficult problem in how we might understand the book of nature today from a Christian perspective. If Christian thinkers once asserted that interpretive relationships between nature and scripture are intended to help us accept and perceive divine grace in nature, how could the same hermeneutic possibly have led to such destructive use of technology toward nature? How could scripture have become the source of evil itself, rather than a healing balm?

Weaknesses in the environmental criticisms are apparent in their resemblance to past reductions of the sacred quality of scripture in relation nature. To blame Judeo-Christian texts and traditions for the evils of the environmental crisis resembles how Gnostics rejected the Old Testament as a misleading text without reading the text carefully in their critiques. At times the environmental critiques appear to assume (if only inadvertently), like the Gnostics, that ultimate sources of moral evil can and should be identified, and that the religious texts of Judaism and Christianity are misleading with regard to our relationship to the natural world.
The limited scope of the environmental perspective becomes more obvious by comparing their responses to Christianity with interpretive turns during the early modern period. Readings of nature and scripture in the early modern period espoused some of the problematic assumptions of earlier Christian Gnostics. As Arthur Nock describes, although Gnosticism belongs to a specific time, its obsession with the problem of evil, its approach to human knowledge as saving, and its tendency to “recoil” from human “environment[s]” have often been taken up by others (256). The early modern period serves as one example of this phenomenon. Two major trends, the first related to the tension between manifestation and proclamation, and the other to the problem of suffering, made Western culture more anthropocentric as it came to rely more on human rather than sacred sources of knowledge. Like the Gnostics, the early moderns failed to look more carefully at the balance between the manifestation and the proclamation of the sacred, and at the moral implications of their negative responses to the problem of suffering in nature.

First, loss of faith in a divine creator, in scripture as divine language, and in nature’s capacities to reveal sacred meanings during the late-medieval and early modern periods resonates with the Gnostic perspectives in late antiquity that I have discussed. During the Middle Ages, there was a common belief that not words, but only concepts could grasp reality (Dupré 103). This belief conflicted with another medieval perspective that literally every word of scripture is sacred and manifests the divine (Otten 257-8). (The book of nature was often similarly used to assert that every life form was revelatory of divinity [Manes 19-20]).
However, skepticism toward words won out as late-medieval nominalist theology drew strength. Nominalist thought weakened links between words and reality, particularly relationships between the divine words of scripture and the natural world. Unfortunately, this also led to a loss of faith that God had created the earth with special purposes for how men should live and develop. As Renaissance humanist movements begin, the human mind rather than the divine word became the source for deriving the purposes of nature, both for theorizing natural laws and for imagining potential uses of nature (Dupré 103-6). As Western culture lost faith in a God who created nature with specific meanings and purposes in mind, they lost faith that human society and nature were meant to be meaningfully connected through divine revelation. Readings of the book of nature slipped out of more genuine interest in relationships with the divine. For example, late medieval Chartrians (a Christian group of thinkers that Otten considers “Gnostic,” but which is of course part of a different movement than Gnostics in late antiquity) attempted to reason out God’s mysteries in the late medieval period through science using the “book of nature” analogy, rather than to uncover religious wisdom, which foreshadowed modern separations of nature from the divine. The influence of such new readings of nature is perceptible in writings from the period such as Alan of Lille’s Plaint of Nature (Otten 267-82). As Louis Dupré explains, two great schisms that continue in Western culture resulted from changes during the late-medieval period: a separation between creator and creation, and a separation between the individual and cosmic meaning (3-4).
The schisms Dupré describes are encompassed in an ‘anthropocentric shift’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries outlined by Charles Taylor. New and objective perspectives arose in which the world was perceived as working through a “self contained,” “impersonal, immanent order” which can be “understood in its own terms” regardless of its divine origins. God’s hand was at work in the world only indirectly through this natural order (290). What resulted was a paradigm shift toward “purely human flourishing” that “narrowed the purposes of Divine Providence.” Previously, Judeo-Christian traditions had often included beliefs that God expected more than human benefit as an end to creation. Not only was it expected that human progress should be purposed toward becoming more divine, but it was also assumed that there were greater purposes in human relationships with nature than human progress and well-being (221-22, 290). Objective approaches to nature promoted anthropocentric practice in that they diminished belief in divine requirements for humans to treat nature according to certain moral and spiritual principles.

Religious readings of nature also diminished through a loss of belief that the sensory experience of nature can be sacred and symbolic. Changes in readings of the book of nature were part of a transformation of Western culture from a visual to a word culture as a consequence of the Catholic reformation. As Peter Harrison describes, “visual experience was denigrated as intrinsically unreliable, and easily susceptible to the perpetration of impostures” (2-3). The visual language of symbols was replaced with the mental language of math and reason as the book of nature was deployed by those promoting the development of
science (Harrison 4-5). Nature was visually emptied of hidden manifestations and made much more transparent. Charles Taylor characterizes such changes in the early modern early as a “second anthropocentric shift,” an “eclipse of grace.” “The order God designed” he explains, “was there for reason to see.” Previous to this time, even those with great faith in human powers to reason would have added the stipulation that humanity’s fallen state necessitates divine grace (222).

Now the world was perceived as “a natural order … purged of enchantment, and freed from miraculous interventions and special providences from God, operating by universal, causal laws (290). Undoubtedly, there are many ways that this disenchantment benefited Western culture’s relationships with nature. However, in relation to religious faith and previous perceptions of God’s influence in the world, this transformation created an approach to nature much more centered on human needs and purposes.

Second, the perception of nature and suffering as something evil and non-sacred, evident in modern uses of technology, resonates with Gnosticism’s tendency to reject the natural world, and to rely on knowledge as a saving power for humanity. Tendencies to allow scientific discourses to dominate relationships with the natural world at the beginning of the modern era changed perceptions of suffering. Science justified its divorce from moral philosophy (which had traditionally checked it) by promising to radically diminish human suffering (Borgmann 26). However, the “eradication” of “trouble” would also tend to obscure the presence of divine grace, which like suffering, is ultimately out of human control. Today, attempts to suppress suffering through technology
diminish recognition of human needs for a healing, divine presence in our world (Borgmann 65, 78-79). This trend is also closely connected with the “anthropocentric shift” toward “human flourishing” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Taylor characterizes. Divine purposes for nature outside of human welfare and the necessity of God’s grace were eclipsed by reliance on human capacities to discern and order world through natural laws (221-23, 290). Technology was applied to explain and control sources of suffering to promote human well being above other forms of life. As Michel Serres suggests, nature came to be treated not unlike an enemy (11) as technology came to be used to suppress suffering by extreme measures. Such tendencies to suppress suffering eclipse the sacredness of religious texts. As Heidegger suggests in “The Question Concerning Technology,” modern technology teaches us to reduce nature and other persons to instruments for technology’s own ends, failing to recognize what is non-technological not only in nature but in the religious. God Himself can be reduced to an efficient cause, or a transparent explanation for the way the world is (“Technology” 331). Jean-Luc Marion builds on Heidegger’s argument to suggest that suffering is also reduced to something ultimately traced to human actions. With such a worldview, it is easy to redirect blame from humanity toward to the divine as the ultimate cause of all evil (Marion 6). Modern technology’s tendencies to attempt to control suffering can be destructive of relationships with the sacred. Heidegger suggests that modern technology’s problems started before the technologies themselves were invented, when the West began to have faith in human rationality to tap nature according to exact measures in the seventeenth
century (“Technology” 327). Moral stumbling blocks do not necessarily start with practice, but with decisions to approach the world with excessive confidence in human knowledge to manipulate nature’s workings to solve humanity’s problems.

These criticisms of the influence of science and reason in the early modern period on relationships with nature are not intended to dismiss the good that has come through the Enlightenment in the West’s relationships with nature. Questions surrounding modern science and its influence on moral practice are difficult if only because science has been and continues to be a means of overturning deceptive worldviews and empowering humanity to perform greater good. What I wish to emphasize is that innovations during the early modern period altered perceptions of how religious texts and nature reveal knowledge toward an anthropocentric direction, whatever benefits or vices came from these newly founded beliefs in relation to nature.

Although they challenge the West’s anthropocentric worldviews and exploitative uses of technology, the discussions White, Manes, and Abram raise do not succeed in reconciling reductions concerning interpretation of religious texts and nature that early Christian Gnostics and the early moderns made. First, they offer an incomplete perspective of the tension between manifestation and proclamation. Their perspectives are interested in the denigration of the sensory experience of the sacred in nature that has taken place, which is apparent in Abram’s argument that Western culture needs to reconnect with the “sensuous” experience of nature personally, in White’s suggestion that Christianity needs something like a pagan “sacred grove” (189-91), and Mané’s suggestion that we
need to learn to hear nature’s true voice again through altering human-centric tendencies in our language to become more like animistic cultures (15-16, 24-26). To some degree, they extol the kind of experience that Ricoeur calls hierophany or manifestation in an effort to correct the mistakes of past generations. Nevertheless, they fail to approach the possibility that scripture is comparable to nature’s voice in our moral relationships with the world because scripture presents itself to readers as something more-than-human. Their approaches contrast with Gnostic treatments of the problem of evil in nature in that they seek (rather than deny) a sense of unseen sacred purposes in nature. They contrast with early modern innovations in that they overturn the assertion that relationships with nature should center on human flourishing. But their arguments resonate with early Gnostic perspectives of how manifestation and proclamation in that they fail to think carefully about how religious narratives extend sacred meanings that can strengthen perceptions of the sacred in nature. Although Manes, for example, attempts to acknowledge that experiences with the book of nature must have been much more complex than he can account for in his article, he nevertheless tends to treat scripture and exegesis as imposing artificial and degrading meanings on nature a priori in his brief discussion of them (19-29).

The problem of evil is also present in their discussions, but reduced in an anthropocentric way that reflects, rather than challenges, paradigms that have upheld modern technology. Like Gnostic thinkers, they take a somewhat distanced approach to living relationships with the natural world in that they do not fully address the presence of suffering in nature. Rather than recoiling from
nature’s adversities consciously as in Gnosticism, their arguments do not address how human suffering and attempts to suppress evil through extreme measures is a dimension of immoral uses of technology. One might phrase the question raised not as “How should we respond to the presence of suffering in nature in order to overcome immoral practice?” but “Whom do we blame for human suffering and the suffering and damage inflicted on the natural world?” To some extent, their writings assume it is possible to identify specific sources of the evils of the environmental crisis in order to find solutions. Such assumptions are comparable to Gnostic interests in inquiring into the sources of evil and human suffering and early modern attempts to use science to repress the causes of human suffering. Attempts to trace the origins of the environmental crisis in religious texts and traditions can be interpreted as an unintentional way of treating what is holy as an explanation for the world’s workings.

THE “BOOK OF NATURE” FROM A RELIGIOUS, ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The pertinence of the problem of evil and the tension between manifestation and proclamation to the book of nature provides a space in which to address the book of nature’s significance in the context of the environmental crisis from a new perspective: how might an understanding of the book of nature help us to respond to the presence of evil and suffering in the world and how texts and nature reveal sacred meanings?
Yet creating a religious perspective of the medieval book of nature poses a special challenge. The tradition is distant from us, and its cultural prevalence during the Middle Ages only makes the analogy more difficult to characterize today (Otten 261). I will offer a contemporary religious perspective of the book of nature by interpreting Shakespeare’s comedy *As You Like It* in light of contemporary religious philosophy. Shakespeare’s work can serve as a way to imagine what relationships between nature and scripture might have once been like, or perhaps only what they should have been like.

Shakespeare’s depictions of the “book of nature” are relevant to contradictions between contemporary and medieval perspectives of the hermeneutic because of his early modern position. He lived in a time when the divide between divine words and nature that transformed the modernized West had just begun to be noticeable. Shakespeare’s plays, like many literary works from his time, respond to a sense of illusoriness and deception in the external world (Dupré 98-99). During Shakespeare’s life, the book of nature had been revived as a subject of interest and speculation. As Paul Willis argues, it is probable that Shakespeare was conscious of this as he wrote *As You Like It*. Protestant thinkers of his time tended to believe that the book of nature was a legitimate religious analogy and experience, although they also usually added disclaimers that nature and humanity both have limitations—nature to reveal and humans to perceive revealed truth. Michel De Montaigne expressed perhaps the greatest cynicism toward the book of nature. He responded to Raymond Sebond’s essay that argued that men could perceive divine meaning with clarity in nature.
with a strong attack on human capacities to properly “read” nature (Willis 66-67). Montaigne’s “defense” of Sebond’s view became a full-fledged assault on human reasoning and philosophy. However, Montaigne thoughtfully argued that the “knot” that should connect humanity with divine through nature is divine grace, not human reasoning (Montaigne 395). Shakespeare’s play continues the critical thinking of his time about the book of nature. Like Montaigne and others, Shakespeare appears to have been doubtful of human abilities to perceive divine truths in nature with accuracy, but his scenes also uphold the possibility that nature can manifest the sacred. As Willis suggests, Shakespeare overthrows the “cliché” of the book of nature in order to reveal the “complexity” behind it rather than to discredit the tradition itself (Willis 72). He examines the tension Montaigne identified between reading nature through human reason and reading nature with the help of divine grace. His scenes can be interpreted to juxtapose anthropocentric “readings” of nature that were developing during his time with more open religious perspectives of nature.

*As You Like It* could be considered to be what Jonathan Bate calls an “ecopoetic,” work, a piece of literature that reveals something about what it means to live with and in nature and has potential to transform relationships with nature. Bate draws on Martin Heidegger’s concept of *poiesis*. Poetry and the arts are ways of creating comparable to the workings of nature. Unlike modern technology, which challenges and disguises nature, they reveal truths about what it means to live in the world with natural life. Ecopoetics asserts that despite the division between nature and humanity created by the technology and the
environmental crisis, culture and nature are not completely severed; poems can speak powerfully to us about how relationships with nature can and should be (251-62). Poetry may be an essential tool in overcoming the environmental crisis (282-3). As Heidegger suggests, poetic language is a form of *techne* that can fill our needs to overthrow contemporary moral blindness perpetuated through our use of technology (“Technology” 339-41). Unlike modern technology’s exploitive practices, poetic language performs constructive work in our moral relationships with nature. Ecopoems can allow us to step outside of the thinking of technological culture and to reconnect with true relationships with nature, while looking to both past and future (Bate 282-83). Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* might help us look at interpretive relationships between nature and scripture in the past and future with new eyes.

As I discuss how the play applies to a phenomenological understanding of interpretive relationships between nature and scripture, I will draw on contemporary religious philosophical writings, including essays by Paul Ricoeur on interpretive relationships with scripture collected in *Figuring the Sacred*, Jean-Luc Marion’s “Evil in Person,” in *Prolegomena to Charity*, and Albert Borgmann’s “Contingency and Grace” from *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Ricoeur’s writings suggest that despite the desacralization of nature and culture in the West, reconnecting meaningfully with sacred narratives from the past is possible and an important as we address contemporary problems (Wallace 1). Ricoeur offers detailed observations of how interpretive relationships work between scripture and the phenomenological world, partly as a
means of demonstrating that scripture can offer meanings and religious hope amidst contemporary problems as we choose to engage it earnestly. Ricoeur’s writings can help explain how interpretive relationships between nature and scripture work in the play. Marion’s and Borgmann’s writings offer phenomenological descriptions of the experience of suffering and grace that are applicable to *As You Like It*. Their writings focus on how responses to suffering must be carefully considered as we attempt to shatter technological paradigms that have desacralized our world.

While the book of nature has been accused of serving as a source of evil and deterioration in Western culture, Shakespeare’s play, as in the writings of Origen and Augustine, suggests something quite the opposite: religious readings of nature can help us find sources of relief and hope in the face of evil and suffering. As it was in late antiquity, the “book of nature” analogy can be used to help us understand that: (1) scripture and nature can work together in meaningful ways that enrich, rather than diminish, our moral relationships with nature, or in other words, that manifestation and proclamation are interdependent; (2) grace (or the presence of the sacred or divine) and suffering are contingencies outside of human control and are encountered on a personal level; and (3) that grace is perceptible in the midst of evil and suffering, and that suffering is not necessarily evil. The next three chapters will explore each of these facets of the “book of nature” in the play in the order above. By exploring how the book of nature is related to the problem of evil and the tension between how nature and texts reveal the sacred, this thesis will argue that the “book of nature” hermeneutic transcends
the logic of the criticisms of medieval exegetical traditions I have discussed. In addition to this, “the book of nature” carries important implications we can learn from as we continue to approach the problem of how to understand how texts and nature reveal truth and how to respond to the presence of suffering and evil in the context of the environmental crisis.
The Interdependence of Manifestation and Proclamation:

Overturning Environmental Pastoral Reductions

In the last chapter, I argued that environmental perspectives that claim Christianity has reduced the West’s sense of the sacred in nature are unfairly disinterested in reconnecting with religious texts. The argument that Judeo-Christian traditions are causes of the evils of technology is prone to reduce interpretive relationships with scripture and nature by assuming that while hierophanies, or manifestations of the sacred in nature like those animistic cultures once experienced, are good, proclamations, or written scripture and its interpretive traditions, are bad.

In “Manifestation and Proclamation,” Paul Ricoeur describes how the “religious” (proclamation) and the “sacred” (manifestation) may seem irreconcilable. However, Ricoeur suggests, both ultimately center on reception of the sacred, voices that speak to, rather than are spoken by, humanity (65). In a world in which the sacred no longer speaks to humanity through nature or scripture, the only way to restore our sense of the sacred through manifestation might paradoxically be through proclamation.

The assumption that reconnecting with nature through manifestation-like experiences is more important than relationships with religious texts is a pastoral-like reduction of the sacred dimensions of human society and its relationships with nature. Relationships with nature are assumed to be simpler and purer than those with religious texts, which are entangled in the complexities and moral evils
of culture. Similarly pastoral-like reductions of interpretive relationships between
genre and texts are common in contemporary culture, including
environmentalism (Phillips 17-25).

Pastoral assumptions that reduce the hermeneutic between the sacred in
scripture and in the natural world can be challenged. Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*
can help us to engage this problem. In criticism, the play has sometimes been
assumed to uphold conventions of pastoral romance. Yet a closer reading suggests
that country and court resist any simple division from each other. Life in the
country is as adverse and complex as life in the court. The conflict of the play is
not so much about the moral superiority of the forest and the corruption of court
life, but between two ways of living represented by two leaders: Duke Frederick,
who denies and destroys non-human sources of hope, and Duke Senior, who
openly seeks them. The play seems to suggest not that experiences with nature are
needed to refresh a corrupt society as much as it suggests that religious meanings
are needed to create a better world in response to evil and suffering. Encounters
with nature are only one half of the solution in the play. The other necessary
solution is freedom to believe that human relationships with natural entities might
be more meaningful than they at first appear. Only as the characters become
receptive to the sacred in both nature and other sources, including religious
preaching and love (which we might compare to proclamation) are the schisms
between country and court resolved. Like the characters in the play,
environmental writers need to remain open to the importance of engaging the
sacred not only in nature, but also other sources like scripture as they seek solution for our society’s moral challenges.

Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* presents us with “readings” of the “book of nature” that suggest that manifestation and proclamation are comparable to each other because of their capacities to convey sacred meanings, and that they work together. Neither religious proclamation nor manifestation can be reduced or dismissed as irrelevant to the problems of the world of the play. The “book of nature” hermeneutic does not necessarily entail imposing religious meanings on nature. Instead, it helps the sacred be perceived in both nature and other sources of spiritual meaning within society. *As You Like It* and Ricoeur’s essay on “Manifestation and Proclamation” suggest that when the natural world becomes desacralized and isolated to society, proclamation is sometimes necessary to strengthen abilities to sense the presence of the sacred in the phenomenological world.

CONTEMPORARY PASTORAL PARADIGMS AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

Dana Phillips characterizes post-modern conceptions of nature and culture as a pastoral-like paradigm. In pastoral, nature is simple and isolated from society, which is complex and corrupting. Today, relationships with nature are reduced by assumptions that human discourses and technologies have become such essential sources of meaning that nature no longer shapes what it means to be human. Faced with the conflicted (and corrupt) voice of culture, nature’s purer and simpler voice is drowned out and isolated from humanity. As Phillips suggests,
post-modern culture sometimes even seems to delight in the supposed defeat of
nature’s voice by the current society (24, 27). Pastoral worldviews apply
particularly to the way we envision our relationships with texts and nature. As
Jonathan Bate describes, in post-modernity it often seems that “all marks” have
become “textmarks” (175), or that human discourses prevent nature from
revealing itself as non-human. Even many of our attempts to value and relate to
natural life often end in ridiculous impositions of human meaning, and
“hyperreal” visions in which animals and other entities are understood primarily
through analogies to human activities, as Umberto Eco describes (Phillips 20-23).
Natural entities are treated as objects appropriated into culture by consumption.

Such reductive relationships between human discourses and nature appear
to be perpetuated by modern technology. As Albert Borgmann suggests, the
center of contemporary Western culture has become modern technology and the
commodities it provides. Individuals have become isolated consumers of products
they know virtually nothing about, and which are created in public spaces void of
any sense of “celebrating” the “commanding” presence of art, nature, and the
phenomenological world. Our “culture of technology” assumes that it is normal to
live alienated lives in which we consume and are influenced by what ultimately
derives from humans and technology and no longer engage religious or sacred
meanings (Borgmann 29, 37-41, 85-91, 121-27). As Phillips describes, it often
seems as if now when we encounter nature, it is only through media of technology
(Phillips 25). Human discourses feed off of technology’s deception that humanity
(as opposed to non-human entities) is the only real influence on events. Humanity
does not allow itself to be “spoken to” by what is non-human as it isolates itself from nature through modern technology (Heidegger, “Technology” 332).

In a world in which human texts and technologies mask nature’s “voice” and its otherness, it seems reasonable to credit Judeo-Christian scripture and interpretive traditions for the advent of modern technology. Extending meanings from Judeo-Christian texts to relationships with nature, environmental writers claim, helped jumpstart the West’s obsession with treating nature as a transparent text deciphered through human discourses. To White, medieval religious culture and Judeo-Christian texts led to immorally anthropocentric worldviews. In light of this, the loss of pagan animism in the West is somewhat tragic. In the future, religious cultures must somehow learn to rediscover a sense of sacredness in nature (189). Manes describes how in the animistic world, humans listened to voices in nature in addition to human language, preventing the use of anthropocentric speech and practice (15-17). The Bible played a role in justifying the humanistic attitudes that would lead to an obsession with anthropocentric language in the West (19-21). To Abram, the alphabet which spread with Western book religions replaced the animistic qualities of nature, leading us to justify polluting the air and the world generally as it lost its sacredness (239-42, 250-60).

While scripture, or proclamation, has proven harmful, animism provided moral relationships in the ancient world because of the ways it allowed cultures engage the natural world as a non-human presence.

However, as, Phillips argues, environmentalists fall into some of the same pastoral traps that afflict contemporary culture in general, which is evident in
these perspectives of the distinction between manifestation and proclamation. In its early years, ecocriticism was often criticized for favoring idyllic visions of nature and ignoring nature’s complex relations to culture (Levin 172). Pastoral is a genre that ecocriticism has often drawn on, sometimes without scrutinizing its conventions (Phillips 17). The problem with pastoral in ecocriticism runs on a deeper level than any preference for idyllic literary worlds. Environmental writers, Dana Phillips describes, often appear to have experienced a life-changing realization. While wrestling with difficult texts, they recognize that while nature seems simple and good, culture is endlessly complex and often bad (3). Yet, while ecocritics are critical of the influence many discourses have had on nature, they also have great confidence in the power of poetry to restore personal relationships with nature through representation (Phillips 7). Culture and texts are looked to as both culprits and heroes in the environmental crisis, with power to save and destroy relationships with nature, much as city dwellers can be both evil and corrupt or romantic and heroic in the world of pastoral literature.

The arguments of White, Manes and Abram maintain a somewhat exaggerated role of human texts and language prevalent in post-modern pastoral. This comes at the expense of a more thorough discussion of scripture as a sacred text. In some instances, the words of the Bible themselves are assumed to have been such a dominant force in interpretative traditions that the text has proven itself culpable of choking nature’s sacred voice. For example, Abram theorizes that a respect for the air as symbolic of God’s sacred breath was once connected to the act of interpretation in Hebrew tradition. Hebrew had no markings for
vowels, which may indicate the fact that active participation was required on the
part of the reader to bring the words to life with his breath, analogous to the
breath of God providing the world with life. But this recognition was lost once the
text was translated into languages with written vowels. Abram leaves us to
assume that formal use of language trumps the significance of God’s *ruach* that
remained to be uncovered in text, or that connecting ourselves to nature through
language matters more than the sacred meanings themselves that could continue
to connect the text with sacred understanding of the phenomenological world
(239-51).

Although Abram, White, and Manes suggest that we need to learn to hear
nature’s voice for ourselves by experiencing nature personally, the solutions they
pose also rely on the power of language to reshape these relationships. They
suggest the West create new narratives and ways of using language that avoid
anthropocentrism. Although he refers to the possible importance of reinterpreting
Judeo-Christian texts, White also suggests that the West may need a new religion
to deter its anthropocentrism. (192-93). Reconnecting with the sacred in nature
through some means appears to take precedence over judging whether texts are
holy and discerning their moral implications. To Abram, solutions lie in writing
stories that weave human experience into local landscapes, which is the closest
way we can imitate moral relationships animistic cultures have with the land
(272-74). To Manes, nature can begin to speak again if we deliberately choose to
rid human language of its anthropocentric center (25-26). Confidence in our
powers to change the West’s language and culture for the better is a key to reconnecting with the sacred in nature in their discussions.

Because it is associated with complex historical questions, Judeo-Christian scripture is treated somewhat as a literary or historical text comparable to non-religious narratives and or philosophical writings. Paul Ricoeur suggests that in scholarship that treats scripture as a historical text, the possibility of uncovering sacred meanings is cut off, as the text is severed from the living religious dialogue (religious reading, speaking and writing) it is intended for (Figuring 220). Jonathan Bate writes that environmental criticism needs to retain the possibility that despite post-modernity’s assumption that “all marks are textmarks,” or that the only meanings we engage are human-derived, “certain textmarks called poems can bring back to our memory humankind’s ancient knowledge that without landmarks we are lost” (175). We can extend this idea beyond literature to scripture, which is itself a special kind of poetry, with a second level of reference to the real world (Ricoeur, Figuring 44-45, 58). In many cases, environmental thought might hold closer to the prospect that religious texts, and even particular texts and traditions, offer vital meanings for our relationships with nature. Even though it is enmeshed in the history of Western culture, Judeo-Christian texts may play an irreplaceable role in allowing us to recognize that “without landmarks we are lost,” or that without engaging nature as something sacred, our culture is left to the impoverishment of our society’s isolation from nature.

In order to approach relationships with nature and scripture more thoughtfully, environmental writing needs tools to move beyond the pastoral-like
paradigms that reduce the vital quality of scripture as a sacred text. One possible way to challenge pastoral-reductions of relationships between texts and nature is to engage literature that addresses the pastoral by exploring pastoral’s tendencies to isolate and simplify nature. Terry Gifford suggests an alternative to pastoral perspectives that avoids reductive idyllicism as well as the pessimism of anti-pastoral modes: “post-pastoral.” Post-pastoral isn’t necessarily aligned with post-modernism; it encompasses literary works from all time periods that suit its goal of using pastoral as a means of trying to heal schisms between nature and culture (in this case we might add, between nature and scripture). Unlike some anti-pastoral modes, it doesn’t relinquish hope that relationships between society and the natural world can become harmonious. Post-pastoral criticism seeks to ask, “What would be the features of writing that can point towards a right way to live at home on our planet earth?” (Gifford 17-18). In relation to the tension between environmentalism and Christian texts, we might specifically ask, “What features of Judeo-Christian scripture may point towards a right way of dwelling on the earth?”

AS YOU LIKE IT

*As You Like It* fits Gifford’s description of a post-pastoral work because of the way that it challenges the pastoral conventions of its time. The play has often been received as a traditional pastoral work (Daley, “Dispraise” 300-1). At first, this seems reasonable. The plot of *As You Like It* draws heavily on a contemporaneous pastoral romance, Thomas Lodge’s popular *Rosalynde* (Latham
The setting is not the deep forest but shepherds’ country, a mix of woody areas and sheep pastures (Daley, “Woods” 172-75). At times descriptions suggest that Duke Senior, the benevolent leader banished from his court, creates a “golden world” or idyllic society in the country, a place of festive feasts and charitable sharing of nature’s abundance in which the sensory experience of nature replace the arts, letters, and music of the court (Daley, “Dispraise” 300). Forest life appears morally superior to the court, the ceremonies of which Shakespeare belittles (Daley, “Dispraise” 312), as if to uphold pastoral’s traditional schism between country and city. While the court is corrupting and false, nature is refreshing and cleansing. Political evils are only purged as courtiers experience a retreat in the forest.

Yet the difficulties experienced in shepherds’ country cannot be so easily separated from the adversities at the court. If Shakespeare affirms pastoral ideals, he also overturns them. When the characters refer to the forest, it is usually with “dispraise” rather than admiration (Daley, “Dispraise” 306). Nature and fortune, representative of conditions out of the characters’ control (Montrose 28), often lead to a bleak outlook. The ideal of a “golden world” is juxtaposed against the reality of human hunger and exhaustion in the forest, as well as the necessity of killing animals to live. Shepherds’ work is described in detail, including the greasy, tarry hands that come from handling and performing surgery on sheep (III.ii.53-64). Touchstone’s famous song about lovers and springtime contrasts with the chilly winter’s wind in other lyrics and scenes in the play (V.iii.16-33, II.vii.174-90). Rather than the fair-haired shepherdess of Lodge’s poem, Phebe
resembles the inconstant and somewhat “foul” or plain “dark lady” from Shakespeare’s sonnets (Daley, “Dispraise” 311-12; III.v.8-48). This alteration seems to signal, like Shakespeare’s “dark lady,” (a figure he used to challenge Petrarchan conventions), that the work is intended to explore questions raised by contemporaneous poets, but in ways that probe such problems with greater depth by focusing on the mundane rather than the ideal. If being ignored by an ideal beloved like Petrarch’s “Laura” is bad, what does being betrayed by an obviously flawed one feel like? Or, in the context of pastoral, if moral dilemmas arise in an idyllic countryside, what is it like to face realistic problems in relationships with the natural world? Shakespeare sometimes seems to directly challenge pastoral conventions by exposing their absurdity. Scenes such as the discovery of Orlando’s poorly written poetry about Rosalind pinned on trees and Corin’s and Touchstone’s conversation about the dirty work of a shepherd seem to openly mock pastoral traditions (III.ii.87-153, III.ii.52-76).

The play’s unusually realistic portrayal of a pastoral countryside is also evident in its allusions to political issues of the time, including primogeniture. In Lodge’s work, primogeniture was reversed so that the younger son inherited all the father’s love and land, but in Shakespeare we find a realistic use of the tradition (Montrose 34). Shakespeare also appears to be mindful of struggles in rural society in Elizabethan England. The development of agrarian capitalism shaped early modern schisms between nature and culture and the development of pastoral poetry. In England, the land was now treated more as a tool for aristocratic profit rather than as the center of agrarian communities (Williams 20-
As You Like It has sometimes been understood as a reaction to the enclosure riots of Elizabeth’s time (Wilson 1-4). One of the tensions in traditional pastoral poems had been the threat of eviction in country life, but in the Renaissance, this function of pastoral to portray human connections to nature as a “living world” was forgotten (Williams 17-18). Shakespeare reconnects pastoral with loss of working one’s own land. We see this in one of the first scenes in the Forest of Arden, where the shepherds at work do not own their own land, which is soon bought up by Celia’s aristocratic gold, much as country life came to be ruled by the finances of the elite (Wilson 16; II.iv.71-100).

Shakespeare’s portrayal of nature as mundane overturns pastoral conventions particular to the Renaissance. In pastoral romance, the shepherd is an “idealized mask” for the aristocrat (Williams 20). Traditionally, the pastoral country was often a site of social equality; the origins of moral virtue were irreducible to either country or city. Pastoral romance dismissed such conventions by affirming the legitimacy of social hierarchies and the court’s superiority (Kronenfield 334). It promoted the interest of the aristocratic society prospering at the cost of agrarian communities. Nature is portrayed through lenses of science and tourism (the “real interest” is court life rather than “country life in any of its possible forms” [Williams 20-22]). In these ways, pastoral romance is more reductive of relationships between court and country than older bucolic conventions. Shakespeare’s mundane forest is juxtaposed against romanticized and alienated portrayals of human relationships with the land. Even in the one incident he upholds a romanticized depiction of nature, Oliver’s attack by a lion,
he does so somewhat satirically (IV.iii.98-132). Shakespeare overturns the ideal in the country for the real paradoxically as if in effort to restore pastoral’s former capacity to assert ideals of equality between court and country. He juxtaposes Christian teachings of equality and humility with courtly assertions of moral superiority (Kronenfield 332-48).

As Albert Cirillo suggests, what we find in Shakespeare is not conventional pastoral, but pastoral “gone awry,” which exposes the pastoral as a convention in tension with real relationships between the country and city (19), both of which present moral challenges. The world of the play, in both the country and the court, is in need of “moral regeneration” (Daley, “Dispraise” 303). The distinction drawn in the play is not between agrarian life and the court life as good and evil, but between two ways of living: the usurping Duke Frederick’s at court and the banished Duke Senior’s in the forest. As Stuart Daley explains, the question raised by the play is how to make a better world, or how to respond to the ethical challenges in it (Daley, “Dispraise” 303). This more specifically becomes a matter of which ruler’s way will prevail, and which can create a better world that responds appropriately to evil (Daley, “Dispraise” 312). Nature is part of this world and solutions that are uncovered, but is not a primary solution in itself (Daley, “Dispraise” 303).

We can apply the question raised in the play to gain a new perspective of questions raised about Judeo-Christian traditions in contemporary culture. Contemporary culture’s tendencies to isolate itself from nature that environmental perspectives respond to resonate with the alienation of English society from
nature that Shakespeare shows interest in. One of the questions raised in the play, as in the environmental perspectives of Christianity, is how moral regeneration can occur when alienation from nature is coupled with a loss of sacredness. Shakespeare treats conventional pastoral distinctions as too reductive to address this question; neither the country nor the court alone provides clear solutions. Something more is needed to help restore moral relationships in both. The issue can be elucidated by drawing a further distinction between the worldviews of the two Dukes. While Duke Frederick’s worldview tends to eclipse sacred meanings, including ways of engaging natural life in the forest as something more-than-human, Duke Senior deliberately seeks to perceive non-human meanings in the forest and from other sources. The two worldviews are distinguished not as much by association with country and court (the influence of each ruler can actually be sensed in both), but by their openness to sacred sources of meaning and hope. Similar to how neither court nor country is the ultimate determinant of moral virtue in some pre-Renaissance pastorals, Shakespeare makes divine wisdom and providence (something irreducible to country or court) a source of moral virtue. The tension between lowly shepherds and cultured aristocrats found in pastoral romance is transformed into a tension between “lowly” Christian virtues and human-imposed hierarchies (Kronenfield 334-42).

The ambivalent portrayal of nature in the play correlates with the worldviews of the two leaders. Those who follow Duke Frederick, or have at least been tainted by his worldview through the abuses at court, tend to “read” nature as bitter or empty of meaning, and society’s relationships with it as tragic. Those
who follow Duke Senior are able to perceive hope and beauty in nature despite its adversities. When Duke Senior’s society is being described, it is often an Edenic view of nature, or a world in which the vices of evil and suffering are no longer keenly felt.

I will first discuss Duke Frederick’s worldview and the modes of “reading” nature it promotes. We first find examples of such perspectives of nature in the opening scene in the de Boys’ home. The eldest brother Oliver withholds his younger brother Orlando’s inheritance, in time even plotting to kill Orlando for his own gain. Orlando the younger brother is well-liked and naturally good, but the abuse of his brother leads him to take a dismal outlook, which encompasses his perceptions of the natural world. Orlando feels his life has been degraded to be no more meaningful than those of his brother’s farm animals (I.i.9-16). That which “nature” has given him (including his moral virtue), his brother can easily take away (I.i.17-19). To Orlando, any providence in nature can be trampled by human evils. Orlando brings this worldview with him into the forest after being nearly killed by his brother (II.iii.17-76). He appears to assume that the murderous desires of his brother are mirrored by the threat of starvation in a “savage” forest. Although it is agrarian land, the country seems an uncultivated “desert” to him (II.vii.94-107, III.ii.125).

Nothing “speaks” to Orlando in the forest; the fact that he sees the trees in need of “tongues” suggests this. In order to make the forest more livable to himself, Orlando hangs and carves poems on the trees (III.ii.127). The voices he provides the trees with express his personal hopes and fears. On the “fairest
boughs,” Orlando attaches Petrarchan love sonnets about Rosalind (III.ii.135-40). On others, he writes poems about human strife, betrayal and death (III.ii.129-34). The posting of poems on trees is a romantic pastoral convention, one of the “poetical commonplaces” the play shares with its sources (Latham xxxi-ii). Shakespeare plays on inscribing trees as if to suggest the absurdity of using poetic language to engage nature. Orlando’s poems betray his ignorance. They and his act of hanging them on the trees are quickly mocked by Touchstone (III.ii.88-116). The image of the trees having tongues comically alludes to the medieval tradition of the book of nature. While “reading” nature as savage and in need of some culture (aided by his poems), Orlando does not truly “read” anything because he imposes vacant meanings. His poems stem not from religious interpretation, but from experiences at the court, especially betrayal. They are man-made meanings that prevent nature from revealing itself as anything besides destitute or full of false hopes. Orlando compares Rosalind to infamous mythological characters to describe her beauties, making his praises empty and even insulting (III.ii.141-54). His hopes seem so fragile that he cannot risk mixing them in poetry with the fears he feels lest they are destroyed.

Duke Frederick’s worldview, which has tainted Orlando, is comparable to a desacralized world in which nature has lost its “commanding” presence1 as something non-human. Human voices have come to dominate relationships with nature. Orlando wishes to aid his own demoralized relationship with nature using

1 “Commanding” presence in reference to Borgmann’s discussion. Borgmann suggests the phenomenological world has lost its “commanding” quality in contemporary technological culture (29, 85-89).
language to “cultivate” it, but fails miserably. He has nothing but the evils of the
court and its narcissistic ideals to draw on. Such a worldview “reads” nature in
correspondence with the experiences of the court, treating it as a transparent text.
Frederick’s influence resonates with the threat of a secularized culture removed
from the sacred and the religious, which was a common theme in theater during
Shakespeare’s time (Grady 26). Shakespeare’s portrayal of Orlando’s reading
appears conscious of shifts in early modern thinking I discussed in chapter one in
which interpreting the sacred in nature through religious discourse was overturned
in favor of the authority of human texts to unfold truths with clarity. “Readers” of
nature began to reason out its mysteries through mundane rather than sacred texts
(Harrison 6-18).

THE LOGIC OF CORRESPONDENCES

One way nature was sometimes approached like a semi-transparent text during the
Renaissance was through the “great chain of being.” One of Christopher Manes’s
complaints about medieval exegesis is that it promoted the development of this
philosophical idea. Each life form was placed in its hierarchical place in relation
to God, placing humanity on the top of creation (20-22). However, the concept is
likely much more ambiguous in regards to immoral interpretive turns than Manes
asserts. By examining medieval and Renaissance writings, Lovejoy demonstrates
how humanity was usually placed in the lower middle section of the chain, above
the animals but below God who was at the top with a multitude of heavenly
beings between. In Western thought, it often served as a source of humility,
though at other times it was used to justify the belief that all forms of life lower than humanity were created solely for human benefit (Lovejoy 184-91).

One aspect of the great chain of being that appears in Shakespeare’s play is the logic of correspondences. The logic of correspondences structures nature and humanity rationally according to similarities, opposites, and causal relationships. Like follows like; the macrocosm predicts the microcosm (Whall 34). The logic of correspondences fulfills the great chain of being’s goal of hierarchically ordering nature. It proves morally dangerous when it orders creation according to human rationality while claiming to do so according to divine design. Helen Whall suggests that the human relationships in Shakespeare’s play are structured in ways intended to allude to the Renaissance logic of correspondences. For example, Oliver and Duke Senior are good, their brothers are bad. Duke Senior has a daughter; his brother has a daughter. Duke Frederick’s usurpation and exile of his brother’s court is mirrored by Oliver’s abuse and exile of his brother. Rosalind at first justifies loving Orlando because her father loved his father (Whall 34-35). Social structures in the city mirror and counterbalance those in the country.

We see that Frederick draws correspondences of this kind himself in that he hates others when they are associated with his enemies. He exiles Rosalind despite her good character because she is her father’s daughter (I.iii.53-65). He hates Orlando despite the wrestling skills he would otherwise praise because he hated his father (I.ii.225-30). As he exiles his enemies to the forest, a “logic of correspondences” between city and court is established. Both country and city are
adverse and brutal; the country is evil because it is the proper place to punish
Frederick’s enemies. When meanings in nature are “read” in correspondence with
Frederick’s evils, nature unfolds itself as a mirror to the tragedies of society. In
addition to Orlando’s reading of the forest, we find such parallels between the
evils of the court and in nature in the responses of Duke Senior’s men (who
voluntarily join him in his banishment out of compassion [I.i.98-104]) to a dying
stag they come across in the forest. As one of them describes:

To-day my Lord of Amiens and myself
Did steal behind [Jacques] as he lay along
Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood,
To the which place a poor sequest’red stag,
That from the hunter’s aim had ta’en a hurt,
Did come to languish; and, indeed, my lord,
The wretched animal heav’d forth such groans
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat
Almost to bursting, and the big round tears
Cours’d one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chase; and thus the hairy fool,
Much marked of the melancholy Jacques,
Stood on th’ extremest verge of the swift brook,
Augmenting it with tears. (II.i.29-43)
If deer languish, weep, and groan in their own way as they suffer, they do so very differently than humans do, but the imagery here is not animal. The words, “hairy fool,” and “coat” also indicate this (humorously, the deer appears to be compared with Jacques, and the melancholy he feels due to human evils). The courtiers are trying to perceive the deer’s experience apart from the evils of hunting, but ironically, they do so in ways that only emphasize their dominance over the deer. The deer is a victim of human culture, but is nevertheless understood through corresponding its experience with those of the exiled hunters. This perspective is comparable to post-modern tendencies to assert empty impositions of human meaning on nature, even when compassionate relationships with nature are intended. Although the courtiers desire to improve the morality of their relationship to nature, their interpretations of nature eclipse other-than-human sources of understanding.

Jacques’s response to the deer makes the correlation between tragedy in the human court and nature within Frederick’s worldview even more obvious. To Jacques, the passing deer correspond directly with courtiers. They are “velvet,” “fat and greasy citizens” indifferent to their fellow dying deer (II.i.50-55). Jacques’s interpretation discerns parallels between nature and culture with great transparency; he “pierceth through / The body of [the] country, city [and] court” (II.i.58-59). In the center of both country and city lies betrayal and suffering understood in human terms. Nature does not provide sources of hope or consolation any more than the corrupt society. Jacques suggests that even as voluntary exiles (who have kept their loyalty to Duke Senior), the Duke’s men are
nevertheless “usurpers” and “tyrants” because they must “fright the animals” and “kill them up” in their “native dwelling-place” (II.i.60-63). Duke Senior seems to him more an “usurper” because of his hunting than his abusive brother (II.i.26-28). Jacques appears to feel both victimized as he compares his own situation to that of the dying deer and guilty as someone who must use animals to live.

Shakespeare’s portrayal of correspondences between nature and culture appears dismal based on the scenes in which Frederick’s worldview prevails. The courtiers’ readings of nature resonate with Manes’s argument that the great chain of being fueled anthropocentric worldviews. Analogies that correlate nature with human “texts” smother nature’s ability to speak as something non-human.

However, based on Paul Ricoeur’s discussion of how human experience is correlated with sacred meanings, arguments that nature is silenced by interpreting religious texts and that scripture is irreconcilable with manifestation is false. Manifestation, in addition to proclamation, works by drawing correspondences between human experience and natural entities. The connective bridge is the sacred, or religious meanings irreducible to human metaphors. Animistic cultures do not teach us that there are pure ways to access meanings in nature, but instead that sacred meanings in nature and human experience tend to entangle themselves in a messy bundle as we use language to engage nature religiously, similar to how Abram describes relationships with nature in animistic cultures to work (139-63). Nature does not have one authentic sacred voice to humans; instead, it is part of what Phillips calls, “nature-culture,” the inseparable mixing of human narratives and interpretation, natural entities, and all the ways they interact with each other.
Religious narratives, like myths and the language of animistic cultures, reveal sacred meanings by mixing human experiences with entities in the natural world.

Paul Ricoeur describes the phenomenological experience of manifestation in animistic cultures in his essay “Manifestation and Proclamation” as a variety of ways of corresponding the human with the non-human. These include: (1) correspondences between creation narratives or natural appearances and human actions (specifically, ritual action), (2) “the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm—for example, the hierogamy of earth and sky agrees with the union of male and female,” (3) correspondences between natural entities and states/parts of the human body, and (4) the correspondence between the body, the house, and the cosmos (54-55). Although manifestation is not limited to correlations between the human body, human spaces, and human experiences in general, perhaps the richest meanings in natural entities reveal themselves through such connections.

This does not mean, however, that all is solely a matter of human choices of interpretation. In a culture of manifestation, Ricoeur explains, sacred and religious symbols are “bound” to the land. Religious meanings are not possible, or cannot be what they reveal themselves to be without the presence of natural entities. Nature as a non-human presence shapes human experiences and meanings. The difference between symbols and metaphors, Ricoeur suggests, is that true symbols derive from encounters in nature, while metaphors can be purely the products of culture and the human mind (53).
Yet, if correspondences between the natural and the human are the means through which nature manifests its own voice, why do correspondences between nature and court in the play completely muffle nature’s meanings in the play? Correspondences between court and country are drawn in a society that has lost its connection to the sacred. This desacralization occurs through the overturning of a compassionate leader by a cruel one. By treating the forest, the court, and other humans as tools for his own gain, Frederick spoils the sense of unseen and more-than-human purposes in the forest and the court. No one is safe from exile or his abuse. Because they live in a world that has been stripped of sacred correspondences between human experiences and culture, the perspectives of the exiled courtiers do not exhaust the way correlations between human nature and culture might work. Instead, their readings appear to demonstrate what happens when capacities to engage the sacred, whether in nature or other sources, are lost. Environmental perspectives are concerned with living in a world in which nature and sacred texts have been desacralized rather than with a world in which religious meanings are vibrant. Like Frederick’s court, the ecological crisis forecasts that country and city are both becoming unlivable in a very literal way. Like Jacques’s or Orlando’s worldviews, pastoral environmental reductions can lead to despair at the suffering and evil in nature and human culture, and at failed attempts to escape the desacralization of the sacred that our society falls prey to. This sometimes includes assumptions that we are left to derive vital moral meanings in relation to nature from a society distanced from sacred sources of meaning, including religious texts.
Although a return to personal encounters with nature may seem a wise path to regaining a sense of sacredness in nature, this is a serious challenge in a somewhat desacralized society like ours, as we find in Frederick’s desacralized world. Forming sacred and moral relationships with the land is not always as simple as meeting the physical presence of nature personally. Today, environmental epiphanies often fail to shatter the dominance of desacralized culture and its instrumental relationships with nature as long and as powerfully as needed to change moral practice. Many who identify themselves with environmental movements nevertheless struggle to see past exploitive lenses of consumerism (Deluca 67-68), much as Orlando fails to move beyond artificial impositions on nature despite his desire for deeper sources of hope.

MANIFESTATION BURSTS THE HUMAN-CENTERED LOGIC OF CORRESPONDENCES

Orlando’s experience in the forest at first seems to contrast greatly with the Duke’s, who is said to live in an ideal world without care:

They say he is already in the forest of Arden,
and a many merry men with him; and there
they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day,
and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world. (I.i.114-19)
This allusion to the “golden world,” or the paradise-like classical past, is one of the few descriptions of the Duke’s society as idyllic. In this passage, the Duke’s brotherhood is also compared to what was in Shakespeare’s time a fad in theater of the time, Robin Hood tales (Knowles 372), which involve idleness and heroic taking from the rich and to give to the poor. However, when we move into Arden itself, we find the Duke’s real relationship with nature to be quite the opposite. His charitable giving comes with difficult sacrifice, including hunting and sacrificing meals to others. Even to Duke Senior, festive feasts are more of a memory of past better times at court than a reality in the present (II.vii.120-26). The Duke’s experience of nature is much the same as Orlando’s. He also has been banished by a jealous brother. Yet his perceptions of nature are quite different. When Shakespeare’s audience first encounters Duke Senior in the forest, he is essentially “reading” the “book of nature,” although his manner of going about it is quite different than Orlando’s:

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything. (II.i.12-17)

As Stuart Daley notes, the Duke’s reading (like Orlando’s) plays off of literary and religious clichés; “good prince” figures and Christian theologians traditionally promoted finding good in adversity, and Shakespeare’s readers were
familiar with this (“Dispraise” 302, 309). His reading, like Orlando’s poems, may appear to expose the book of nature as imposing empty metaphors on nature. However, when contrasted with other readings of nature in the play, the Duke’s reading actually overturns reductive perspectives of the “book of nature” hermeneutic and invites the audience to engage the tradition anew, much as Paul Willis suggests the play does as a whole (72). We know little detail about what the Duke reads in nature. He is open to nature escaping his explanation and its own appearances. The evils of the court do not stifle his ability to perceive sources of wisdom in nature that are not obvious. Unlike the perspectives of his men or Orlando, his reading can be considered religious. The medieval book of nature encompassed the idea that divine grace and purposes were perceptible in natural entities through cross referencing nature with scripture (Benjamins 13). The Duke perceives charity and humility as lessons extended to him by his experience in nature, which seems apparent not only in the way he perceives adversities in nature as “counsellors” that teach him “what [he is],” but also in his choice to create a life “old custom” (II.i.2), which refers to an Eden-like state of peace and brotherly compassion in the woods. In Shakespeare’s time, allusions to Adam’s time were sometimes used in protest for social equality (Barnaby 384-85). The Duke’s reading appears to be one example of the ways Judy Kronenfield characterizes that Christian virtues of equality are juxtaposed against aristocratic hierarchies throughout the play (335-36).

Openness to religious meanings shatters the logic of correspondence in which nature can only be read in light of the evils of the court. To the Duke,
forest unfolds “sermons” and “books” that challenge rather than affirm Frederick’s narcissistic way of life. Shakespeare’s allusion to the book of nature in this passage makes it possible to discuss the Duke’s interpretation as one of more than just manifestation, but also meanings uncovered through scripture. It is obviously not the case that the Duke and his men do not “feel” adversities in nature like the “winter’s wind” as he claims is the case. If he did not feel the wind, it would not serve as a “counselor” to him (II.i.5-11). Meanings perceived through something more than the sensory experience of nature alone allow him to experience the winter in this way, freeing him from dependence on his experiences at court for hope. In addition to a golden world or Adam’s time, we might extend “old custom” to refer to the world before nature and sacred texts were emptied of meanings, or desacralized by Frederick’s court. The “tongues in trees,” “books” in “brooks,” and “sermons in stones” that the Duke perceives are more than impositions of a human-centered text. They derive from “life” when removed from the court, as if they are sacred symbols bound to the experience of living in the forest. The Duke’s words suggest that nature offers alternative meanings to those found in “public haunt.” Even the small parts of creation (such as the toad, or the stone) are valuable and carry hidden religious meanings. We can juxtapose the Duke’s interest in the details of the forest with Orlando’s description of Rosalind as having a “distill’d” measure of nature’s “graces,” that “heaven” otherwise “show[s]” only a “little.” Orlando writes his poems to teach “all who read” (who read the poems, but also the “book of nature” in extension) to know / The quintessence of every sprite” through glorifying Rosalind as
something supreme to the world around her (III.ii.138-44). The “book of nature” in the Duke’s reading scene contrasts with such anthropocentric perspectives of humanity’s place in nature. Here the lowest parts of the chain become sources of humility rather than pride or justifications to exploit lesser forms of life.

In As You Like It, only religious meanings, or what we would compare to proclamation of the sacred, allow characters to overcome desacralized worldviews. Helen Whall argues that the logic of correspondences through which human relationships are initially structured is overturned by deliberate choices to love, which allows characters to draw alternative analogies or correspondences that shatter the tightly ordered relationships in the play. Celia is the first character to overthrow destructive patterns of correspondence. She is loyal to Rosalind despite her father Frederick’s hatred of Rosalind’s father, loving her despite associations rather than because of them (Whall 35-36; I.iii.85-105). In a similar way, purposeful choices to seek and receive meanings concealed by Frederick’s worldview shatter correspondences between nature and the evils of the court.

The quality of proclamation that enables it to restore manifestation is that it bursts the bounds of what might otherwise be perceptible in nature. The first instance of this is when Orlando’s encounter with the Duke’s charitable worldview in the forest begins to loosen the grip of the court’s worldview on his mind. Orlando comes across the Duke and his men in the woods as they are about to eat, and when Orlando fears his servant Adam is going to starve. In desperation, Orlando threatens to attack them if they eat before Adam is revived. Duke Frederick’s warm invitation to the table leads to a very different response
from Orlando, who says, “Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you: / I thought that all things had been savage here … (II.vii.106-7). Although Orlando continues to refer to the forest as a “desert” (III.ii.125), his encounter with the Duke partially explains how his ability to perceive hope grows throughout the play. Duke Senior’s worldview helps Orlando become open to the possibility that the abuse he received at home and in Frederick’s court need not dictate the kinds of relationships he will have in the future. In time, Orlando finds courage to face risks and fears he suppresses in his poems, which I will discuss more in later chapters.

In other instances, the reception of more direct religious meanings alters characters’ relationships with the natural world. At the play’s end, Duke Frederick has decided to go into the woods himself to kill his brother. However, his plan is overturned by his reception of unexpected sacred meanings. As Jacques de Boys (the brother of Orlando and Oliver, who makes his first appearance in the last scene of the play) explains:

And to the skirts of this wild wood he came;
Where, meeting with an old religious man,
After some question with him, was converted
Both from his enterprise and from the world;
His crown bequeathing to his banish’d brother,
And all their lands restored to [them] again
That were with him exil’d … (V.iv.159-65)
In Frederick’s experience, religious words, or proclamation, appear necessary to learn to sense sacredness in nature and in human relationships with the land. Frederick is converted away “from the world” and from his hunger for power in both the court and the forest. It does not seem to be a coincidence that it is on the edge of the wood, like a sacred gateway, that Frederick’s transformation occurs; proclamation works in connection with manifestation in his conversion. It appears that encounters with nature alone were not enough to change Frederick in the past. Although the audience does not witness the conversion so that little detail is known about this transformation, it is nevertheless significant that only religious teaching from an unexpected source proves capable of overthrowing Frederick’s tyranny. The seemingly ad-hoc solution to the schisms between country and court in the world of the play seems to emphasize how moral change stems not from the country or court alone, but by reception of sacred religious meanings. As I will discuss more thoroughly in chapter three but will note here, unexpected religious teaching transforms Jacques in a similar way. When hearing of the Duke’s conversion, his former readings of nature are overturned. Jacques decides to learn from the religious man and to meditate in the forest, leaving the wedding festivities at the end of the play (V.iv.180-82, 195-96). Sacred meanings uncovered in religious language prove necessary to help him perceive nature as something more than a reflection of human evils.
RECONCILING PROCLAMATION AND MANIFESTATION

What I have suggested about proclamation’s capacity to restore a sense of sacredness in nature is doubted for good reason. Environmental perspectives of scripture as having frequently eclipsed the sacred in nature appear affirmed by the history of the Hebrew people recorded in the Bible itself. The Israelites constantly struggled with and were warned against animistic cults. As Ricoeur suggests, Judeo-Christian cultures introduced a polarity between the sacred in nature and the religious word in which the word outweighs the revelation of the sacred in natural entities (56). Prophecy tends to require the uprooting of the people from sacred spaces and entities, which seems to destroy all possibility of sacred cosmic symbolism (57). The word does not appear to be grounded in natural symbols, but to completely remove itself from connection to a sacred sense of the earth.

Ricoeur explains how the uprooting of sacred symbols works in scripture by examining the structures of New Testament parables and proverbs. At first they, like Old Testament prophecies, appear to eliminate the possibility of sacred space in nature. First, rather than the numinous or magical, the parables’ settings draw portray what is mundane or non-mythical (57). Also, the plots or sayings function through metaphorical poetic reference, which obscures first-order reference to a sacred phenomenological world (58). Third, the parables present not an orderly universe bound by symbols, but a natural universe whose sacred meanings are overthrown through reference to something more than the world lived in by readers (60). The rupturing of meaning in the universe occurs through what Ricoeur calls limit-expressions, sayings or plot elements that drive the
power of the text to influence the reader’s interpretive experience to the limits of poetry’s capacity to shape readers’ lives.

Limit-expressions in scripture work through hyperbole, paradox, and extravagance of language and plot. Ordinary settings and events are ruptured through the extraordinary. They are structured to challenge the forms of wisdom normally found in a symbolically bound and orderly universe as if to destroy correspondences that make up a sacred natural world. For example, the expression, “the Kingdom of God is among you” bursts conventional cosmic symbolism in such a way that “Every literal temporal scheme capable of providing a framework to read the signs of the kingdom collapses” (59).

Naturally-directed correspondences, like those one would find in an animistic world, are burst. “What is the universe burst toward?” Ricoeur asks, and answers:

The Gospels say the kingdom of God. But what must be understood here is that this symbol [the kingdom] entirely escapes from the circular symbolic of the cosmic interplay of correspondences. The kingdom of God is polarly opposed to paradise, not only as the future is opposed to the past but as every limit-expression is opposed to the whole interplay of correspondences. (60)

Scripture appears to offer something in opposition to the kind of world that is experienced in manifestation. Sacred correspondences between human action and natural entities seem very purposefully redirected toward the word alone, or at least toward something outside the natural world we know.
Yet manifestation’s relation to proclamation is more complex than this; the two are more similar than Judeo-Christian traditions have often assumed them to be. Manifestation, like proclamation, points toward human needs to believe that nature is more than what it appears, or in other words, that it bursts its own visible meanings. As Paul Ricoeur explains, manifestation works partially through beliefs that disorder is overcome in nature because nature conceals forces not readily apparent:

The sacred power of nature is first attested to by the fact that it is threatened and uncertain. The sacred universe, after all, is a universe that emerges out of chaos and that may at any instant return to it. The sky is ordered and life is blessed only because the chaotic depths have been and must unceasingly continue to be overcome. (52)

Manifestation, can be associated with desires to believe that benevolent forces respond to the chaos in the world in order to make it livable to humans. Nature points to something more than its own visible workings. Manifestation allows us to perceive how nature bursts its own ordinary as entities become “numinous.” Ricoeur suggests:

That a stone or tree may manifest the sacred means that this profane reality becomes something other than itself while still remaining itself. It is transformed into something supernatural—or, to avoid using a theological term, we may say that it is transformed
into something superreal … in the sense of being superefficacious while still remaining a part of common reality. (49-50)

The “stone or tree” is both mundane and extraordinary at once. The logic of this does not contradict Christ’s saying that the kingdom of God is among his disciples on earth. Finding the extraordinary within the ordinary permeates manifestation in addition to proclamation. Both point toward human capacities to sense the presence of more than what is readily apparent in nature, or for “readers” of nature to find more-than-human sources of meaning and hope in the phenomenological world. An example of this parallel between manifestation and proclamation that Ricoeur recognizes is how the promise of salvation (proclamation) resonates with the ordering of chaos by unseen forces in manifestations (66).

Proclamation does not necessarily destroy the possibility of manifestation, though it may claim to warn against false perceptions of sacredness in nature and open our eyes to a fuller sense of sacredness in the world. As Ricoeur suggests, this is evident even in the history of the early Israelites, to whom new cosmic symbols were revealed (65). Cosmic symbolism is not eradicated, but reinterpreted in light of proclamation; proclamation transforms and shapes manifestation (66).

The capacity for nature to burst its normal bounds is something that can be heightened through the religious meanings of scripture. Manifestation and proclamation work together. We see this in Duke Senior’s reading of nature. He sees the extraordinary within the ordinary, like the “precious jewel” in the
poisonous toad’s head, or “sermons in stones” (II.i.14, 17). His “reading” of nature challenges kinds of correspondences that, like the Renaissance great chain of being, or the schisms growing between nature and human society during Shakespeare’s or our own time, are hierarchical and engage nature through destructively human-centered worldviews. It affirms a form of correspondence between nature and human society in which even the seemingly ordinary and small aspects of nature are revealed as full of sacred meaning.

As Paul Ricoeur describes, if the religious word sometimes destroys instances of manifestation, it also establishes and reaffirms it:

The word, we said, breaks away from the numinous. And this is true. But is it not so to the extent that the word takes over for itself the functions of the numinous? … A word that is addressed to us rather than our speaking it, a word that constitutes us rather than our articulating it—a word that speaks—does not such a word reaffirm the sacred just as much as abolish it? (65)

The quality that manifestation and proclamation have in common is both provide ways non-human created meanings can speak. It is for this reason that Ricoeur describes scripture as a voice speaking to humanity rather than one spoken by it, much like the voices of natural life and entities David Abram describes that cannot be reduced to human abstractions (31-56).

Duke Senior’s perception of religious meanings while reading the “book of nature” allows him to perceive sacred meanings in nature. Proclamation bursts the desacralization caused by the human-centered perspectives of the nature in the
court. Like scriptural parables, which draw on domestic settings like sheepherding (Ricoeur, *Figuring* 57-60), Shakespeare’s alternative vision of the pastoral romance ruptures the ordinary with extraordinary hope that affirms the sacredness of everyday interactions with nature.

**INFORMING CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVES**

Not unlike White, Abram, and Manes, Ricoeur responds to problematic assumptions that the world has lost much of its sacredness and because of this, whatever religions survive must make themselves compatible with a desacralized world (61-62). In response to such worldviews, Ricoeur raises the question, “Is religion even possible without the sacred?” Not unlike White, Manes and Abram, Ricoeur argues that the culture of technology and science that has developed in the West is largely grounded in nihilism, a deception that tends to make manifestations of the sacred imperceptible. Recently, Ricoeur suggests, Western culture has begun to ask whether, contrary to assumptions of the culture of technology, life is desirable or even possible without the sacred. Ricoeur’s answer is no. When death, sexuality, birth, and place are stripped of sacred meanings, humanity is reduced to a mere “utensil,” and life loses its meaning (*Figuring* 64).

Ricoeur’s argument suggests the importance of revisiting Judeo-Christian proclamation traditions in order to engage a sense of the sacred in nature. In light of his view of the relationship between the proclamation and manifestation, doing so may even prove an essential step in addressing problems with contemporary relationships between nature and culture. When the religious is completely
removed from sacred symbols in nature, Ricoeur suggests, society loses its sense of the meanings and purposes of both nature and human experience. The religious is intended to be grounded in belief in a sacred phenomenological world (64). Because proclamation is intended to work interdependently with manifestation, engaging the religious is a way to reengage the sacred in nature. (White argues, like Ricoeur, that our need for renewed religious belief may be a matter of reinterpretation of Judeo-Christian texts and traditions (191-93). His argument, however, is more ambivalent toward the possibility that drawing on these specific traditions may be essential in some cases). The return to Judeo-Christian proclamation is possible because scripture is irreducible to a product of culture. Proclamation is not a human-focused dialogue between human texts and readers’ conceptions of the phenomenological world. In religious interpretive relationships, scripture and nature both extend meanings to humanity and renew readers’ relationships with the phenomenological world. Addressing concerns with the influence of religious beliefs on relationships with nature might not necessarily require us to find or form a new religion, alter our use of language deliberately, or create new narratives to replace old ones, but it might require us to interpret sacred narratives we have inherited anew with greater openness to the possibility that they can alter our relationships with the natural world. Environmental paradigms become reductive when they dismiss scripture’s claim that it, like nature, is something other-than-human, and as such may overthrow immorally human-centered or self-centered worldviews.
In *As You Like It*, religious perspectives of nature do not affirm deceptively human-focused modes of ordering relationships between city and court, but suggest that something more than culture, and even more than the physical presence of nature, must aid the courtiers as they seek more hopeful and more compassionate relationships with nature. Environmental thought can move beyond treating the religious as a reflection of our human evils, much as the courtiers need to move beyond seeing nature as such a reflection of Duke Frederick’s abuses.

Perhaps if nothing else, environmental perspectives that lean toward casting blame on religious culture should become more “neutral” toward Judeo-Christian texts and interpretive traditions, much as Phillips suggests they should become toward poetic texts in general (18-19). As Ricoeur suggests, scripture can both abolish and reveal the sacred in nature (*Figuring* 65). Scripture might be treated as neutral in shaping our relationships with nature partly because perceived meanings depend on readers’ interpretive choices. As the play suggests, there are many ways to “read” meanings in nature, and some of these, like Duke Senior’s, manage to retain openness to nature’s ability to inform humanity, and others, like Orlando’s or Jacques’s do not. This raises a difficult question that I will address throughout the next chapter: how can we ever tell if our interpretive relationships are genuinely open to perceiving sacred meanings?
Perceiving the Sacred and Suffering as Contingencies: The Peregrination of Wisdom in the Wind in *As You Like It*

By identifying Western culture’s need to reconnect with the sacred in nature, White Manes, and Abram begin to overthrow the technological worldviews they scrutinize, but do not completely avoid their influence. Another part of contemporary culture’s silencing of the sacred is the silencing of religious texts. Just as we might argue that human relationships with nature will be unethical until we attempt to listen to nature’s own “voice,” as Manes and Abram suggest, we can similarly argue that our relationships with scripture will be immoral until we learn to be receptive to its sacred meanings, its voice rather than ours.

The same worldviews that perpetuate modern uses of technology and prevent the West from perceiving sacred meanings in nature also affect the engagement of religious texts. According to Martin Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology,” the core way we experience technology is “enframing,” or the process of reducing natural entities, human others and the world in general to instruments and resources for human and technological ends. Although technology is not necessarily evil in itself, the way it has come to present itself to us as a means of claiming mastery over the world is immoral and deceptive (311-12, 332-33). Not only nature but also the religious can be made transparent through enframing (331). One reason modern technology alienates us from the otherness or sacredness of nature and religious texts is that our relationships with
both involve “contingencies” that modern technology tends to desensitize us to (Borgmann 65, 78-79). “Contingencies” encompass what escapes human prediction, explanation and control. In nature, the presence of contingencies is evident in the weather, disease, or natural disasters. In religious narratives, contingencies are involved not only in the experiences related in the narratives, but also in the process of interpreting them. Loss of contingency can lead to a loss of meaningful relationships with both scripture and nature.

In order to overturn the foundation of the West’s immoral treatment of nature through technology, we should focus on moral struggles in the West that perpetuate reductive relationships with scripture in addition to nature. Technology itself, Heidegger seems to suggest, should not be treated as the “root” of enframing. The “essence,” or the way we have come to experience modern technology is what leads us to problematic reductions. The cause of enframing is elusive, and even irrelevant in that human experience now usually involves being thrown into a world in which uses of technology deceive us with the appearance of providing human mastery over nature (323-31). We blindly buy into reductions that mask the otherness of non-human entities and the contingent qualities of moral human relationships with the world. In a way comparable to how the essence of technology does not ultimately lie in technologies themselves, the “root” of the ecological crisis goes beyond our religious heritage. Immoral religious perspectives (when accurately identified) would serve, like modern technologies, as manifestations of tendencies to suppress contingencies and
reduce natural entities and others for instruments for human advantage. The ultimate origins of such moral struggles are evasive.

Propensities to ignore the reality of contingencies can deceive us into misunderstanding the interpretations of past generations. This is apparent in environmental perspectives. Lynn White’s argument, for example, that medieval readings of the creation narrative are anthropocentric conceals medieval perspectives that oppose his position. Paul Ricoeur’s reading of the Genesis account in “On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1—2:4a” challenges White’s assumption that the narrative and past readings can be fairly treated from a distanced perspective. A careful, religious reading of the creation narrative’s themes challenges the assumption that the narrative is human-centered. Themes in the creation account and Psalms about how God dispels chaos, how His presence wanders on the earth, and how created beings bear witness of Him suggest ways natural life is an area of interest in its own right. In addition to this, Ricoeur also uses themes from his exegesis of the creation account to model the contextual process of interpretation in which unexpected divine wisdom reveals itself through personal religious reading.

In *As You Like It*, sacred meanings unfold only as the characters acknowledge the presence of both suffering and grace as outside of their mastery. Religious meanings and hope, like adversities, uncover themselves unpredictably and personally. As Paul Ricoeur and Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* suggest, the sacred is a presence that “peregrinates” or wanders like the wind or God’s breath through religious and the natural world, waiting for us to encounter it personally.
and with openness to the meanings it unfolds. Only by accepting suffering and religious hope as contextual, personal, and unpredictable (like the experience of meeting the wind) are the characters able to overcome their tendencies to reduce nature and religious meanings and to suppress suffering. Engaging the sacred in nature and scripture are very similar. We must acknowledge and accept the unpredictable ways both “texts” uncover meanings without attempting to make their significance transparent or non-sacred, much as Augustine and Origen suggested in their writings concerning scripture and adversities in nature.

Ricoeur’s writings suggest that in order to reconnect with the sacred in scripture, we must learn to interpret the text by following where its meanings lead us and extend themselves to us and give up desire to master the text. This does not mean that we can control risks of misconstruing the meanings of text, or that the sacred is a pure voice that makes itself heard apart from everyday experience. Sacred meanings are woven into the real mundane world and into readers’ personal experiences. Learning to acknowledge contingencies in interpretation or to listen for the wisdom of the text can also be distinguished from willful ignorance or passivity. Following the wisdom of the text, unlike being blindly obedient, is an active role in which we seek ways to avoid claiming immoral forms of mastery. We allow ourselves to be mastered by moral constraints and purposes for the natural world we sense to be greater than ourselves.

This chapter will draw on Paul Ricoeur’s essays on the phenomenological experience of engaging the sacred in religious texts and discourse, such as “Naming God,” and “Toward a Narrative Theology.” Paul Ricoeur suggests a
“letting go” in interpretation and religious discourse that resonates with the letting
go of mastery over nature that Heidegger writes may help us escape the dangers
of modern technology. Overturning immoral uses of technology and overcoming
reductive religious readings both involve renouncing desires for mastery. Ricoeur
also suggests that Western relationships with the natural world and our religious
heritage may improve as we become more aware of the contingent presence of
suffering, both today and in past generations. We can begin to gain such
awareness of the West’s exploitive approaches to human and natural others by
engaging religious narratives on a personal level. The destructive worldviews that
repress the sacred in nature cannot be separated from ones that have led us to
ignore and repress the presence of sacred meanings in scripture. Because of this,
reengaging scripture personally may help us regain capacities to perceive the
sacredness of nature.

ENFRAMING NATURE AND THE RELIGIOUS IN TECHNOLOGICAL
CULTURE

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger illustrates how applying
science to technology has led Western culture to reduce nature to an instrument of
human culture. Our applications of technology may not at first appear to have
changed much since antiquity or the Middle Ages; the basic definition of
technology is a means to an end, which still holds true today (312-13). Yet at the
same time, we often argue that the application of sophisticated sciences to
technology puts our technology in a completely different category than all that has
come before (319). Why do we sense that science has altered our experience of technology so greatly? Ancient uses of technology, Heidegger argues, were fundamentally different.

Heidegger writes that we can distinguish ancient and modern technology by examining the “four causes” identified by Aristotle, or the four sources that come together in the creation of an object. The ancient concept of causality suggests there was once a greater sense of how more than human rationality and technology are to thank for acts of creation. Each cause—the material from which it is made, the form it is given, the cultural context in which the object is circumscribed, and the craftsman—are all things to which an object is “indebted” for being brought forth as what it is. As Heidegger notes, the causa efficiens or craftsman is not an efficient cause in the modern sense (the ultimate source of the object). Although the craftsman does play a special role by bringing the other causes together, he is one among three other things the object can credit for being revealed as it is and is aware of this (315). Technology is more than just a means to an end; it is meant to be a mode of revealing things as one thing or another (318).

In modern technology, indebtedness is replaced with causality and instrumentality (316). The modern conception of causation assumes all is transparent to science. Objects are not indebted to the material etc., and the creator is not indebted to the other causes. Instead, the four “causes” are reduced to nothing more than efficient causes in the modern sense. The causes are treated as the resources of technology, which becomes the only acknowledged cause. In
this new conception of causality, objects are seen as merely “reporting” the ways they are produced and tapped by technology (328). The only kind of revealing that modern technology does is a revealing of things as technology’s instruments (326).

Acknowledging indebtedness to something more than human determinations in creating objects is coupled with a loss of a sense of uncertainty. As Heidegger explains, techne was once “reveal[ing] whatever does not bring itself forth and does not lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another” (319). When creating did not apply exact science, the craftsman did not attempt to master exactly how things would turn out; they could turn out “one way or another.” The final object depended on the unique qualities of the natural materials used, the particular purpose the object was intended for, and everything else that is conditional in the process of making an object. However, in modern manufacture, awareness of such contingencies is lost. As Heidegger explains, rather than allowing the materials to be brought forth or unconcealed as one object or another, modern technology challenges and conceals the natural by ordering it to adhere to its conditions. As he asks, “What kind of unconcealment is it, then, that is peculiar to that which results from this setting upon that challenges? Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand …” (322). Modern technology is about forcing things to cohere to human purposes in such a way that does not respect nature’s role as anything more than a resource. Older forms of technology, Heidegger goes on to explain, worked in harmony with the unpredictable conditions of nature, such as
weather. The windmill, for example, is not intended to tap the wind’s energy and make it accessible even when the wind is not, but modern turbines are designed as if to challenge forces of nature themselves (320). Rather than attempting to master natural inconsistencies as turbines do, the windmill works as if it submits itself to be mastered by the power of the wind.

The loss of a sense of indebtedness and uncertainty to our world, Heidegger suggests, alters our relationship not only with nature, but also with the divine. The reductive tendencies of Western culture manifest in technology can also lead us to misinterpret the religious. As he explains:

In whatever way the destining of revealing may hold sway, the unconcealment in which everything that is shows itself at any given time harbors the danger that man may misconstrue the unconcealed and misinterpret it. Thus where everything that presences exhibits itself in light of a cause-effect coherence, even God, for representational thinking, can lose all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance. In the light of causality, God can sink to the level of a cause, of causa efficiens. He then becomes even in theology the God of the philosophers, namely, of those who define the unconcealed and the concealed in terms of the causality of making, without ever considering the essential provenance of this causality. (331)

We blind ourselves to the “the true” in the presence of nature much as the essence of technology blinds us to the sacred in religion (331). Contemporary culture’s
insensitivity to the contingent qualities of nature and the religious prevent us from engaging the sacred.

**REDUCTIVE APPROACHES TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

We can apply what Heidegger suggests about how enframing blinds us to the sacred in nature and the religious specifically to the act of interpreting scripture. As modern manufacture degrades the open and uncertain act of creating, worldviews that conceal the contingent qualities of creating also degrade the open and contextual process of interpreting. Textual interpretation, like making, is a mode of revealing that depends on something that escapes human determinations. Meanings that unfold are *indebted* to more than choices of the human interpreter, including personal experience and circumstances, cultural and historical contexts, and texts which, like natural entities, can reveal themselves and be revealed in an indefinite range of ways. Like revealing an object, the act of interpretation involves uncertainty. Like creating, interpretation reveals the text things “now one way and now another” (319); it is not fixed, neither by the text itself nor the reader.

Similar to how “the essence of technology” conceals the “true” or sacred qualities of natural entities manufacture is indebted to, attempts at mastery can conceal the true and revelatory in scripture. Although the essence of technology may tempt us to believe that nothing is so concealed or sacred that it escapes its grasp of understanding, as Heidegger suggests, this is only a deception that conceals other ways that nature can be revealed (330). Modes of revealing that
attempt mastery challenge and conceal instead of reveal, even to the point of concealing the possibility of perceiving things outside of modern technology’s reductions (330-33).

At times, modern science has had an influence on biblical interpretation and scholarship. Heidegger writes that modern science changed history so that history became a science in its own right. History is “equated” with “the chronicled” (329) so that the distant past is concealed even more than it normally would be by the limitations of texts. We can see the influence of this kind of thinking on the interpretation of biblical texts toward the end of the nineteenth century, when biblical scholarship was becoming empirical as it became a form of historiography. As Elisabeth Fiorenza explains:

The "scientist" ethos of biblical studies was shaped by the struggle of biblical scholarship to free itself from dogmatic and ecclesiastical controls. It corresponded to the professionalization of academic life and the rise of the university. Just as history as an academic discipline sought in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to prove itself as an objective science in analogy to the natural sciences, so also did biblical studies. Scientific history sought to establish facts objectively free from philosophical considerations. It was determined to hold strictly to facts and evidence, not to sermonize or moralize but to tell the simple historic truth—in short, to narrate things as they actually happened. (10-11)
To contrast this with the kind of hermeneutic suggested by the book of nature, we might say that in place of nature, science served as the companion text to scripture, much as it began to during the early modern period when the book of nature was used as a scientific metaphor. Science, rather than personal experiences in the phenomenological world, became the primary key to using scripture and hermeneutics to see the past and the text in the context of the present. The perspective that biblical studies took upon itself in the early twentieth century emphasized the distance and foreignness of the biblical text as a religious work (thereby trying to make its history more transparent). The goal was to present the Bible and its interpretive history from a non-personal, objective reading (Fiorenza 11).

In dialogue with Heidegger’s essay, we might say that the Bible, its interpretation, and even God Himself can be enframed when we choose to treat scripture in this way. When we use scripture and religious faith to explain causes of cultural shifts that have resulted from religious interpretation, it is possible that we treat what claims to be divine or holy as an efficient cause.

The influence of the modern approaches to biblical interpretation can be sensed in the environmental arguments I have discussed, which are at times similarly distanced from past interpretation and the contextual quality of reading. An extreme example of this problem is found in White’s retelling of the creation narrative in Genesis and its interpretations in late antiquity:

Finally, God had created Adam, and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus
establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image … Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As early as the 2nd century both Tertullian and St. Irenaeus of Lyons were insisting that when God shaped Adam he was foreshadowing the image of the incarnate Christ, the Second Adam. Man shares, in great measure, God’s transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism … not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends. (189)

The reductive retelling of the narrative appears intended to model problematic qualities of past interpretations, yet White fails to address his concern with questions of interpretation directly. He leaves us to assume that this is the one interpretation the text invited or received and what he means by “Christianity” is ambiguous. Is it Christian culture and interpretation, or Christian scripture itself that he refers to? Throughout the article, it is cultural and agricultural changes, such as new plowing technology (188) that he uses as evidence for problems in Christian culture. White offers a genetic analysis of culture, in which a religious text is treated as a source of cultural problems. White’s article is written from a partially self-critical Christian perspective that draws on shock value in effort to
distance readers from Christian culture and the meanings of the narrative. Perhaps by disassociating his audience from the narratives, he sees a path toward engaging them more carefully on a religious level, but if this is the case, he does not make his intentions clear enough. Greater consideration of the complexities of interpretation is needed to nuance his perspective of medieval Christian perspectives.

In addition to reducing the act of interpretation itself, White’s discussion of medieval exegesis is misleading. In a book on the history of the exegesis of Genesis 1:28, Jeremy Cohen argues that in Jewish and Christian medieval traditions, discussion of the counsel to “subdue the earth” given to Adam and Eve was understood as subject to special conditions because of the fall and human error. Dominion and human superiority (due to humanity’s special capacities of reason) over other parts of creation was limited because of Adam’s disobedience (229). Thus, the creation account was interpreted in such a way that the Genesis 1:28 counsel should work as a compelling source of humility and restraint. There was actually little emphasis placed on divine counsel to “master the earth” (and much more on the issue of procreation in the same verse) (229). This jeopardizes White’s argument that anthropocentric readings were used to justify new hopes to master nature through technology. His distanced approach to interpretation may be part of what prevents him from acknowledging medieval perspectives that strikingly oppose his argument.
SUPPRESSING SUFFERING IN SCRIPTURE AND NATURE

Reductions of the uncertain way nature and religious meanings are revealed can blind us to a specific kind of contingency: suffering. Suffering unfolds in nature and scripture (in recounted events and prophecy) as something out of full human control. According to Albert Borgmann, contemporary culture treats suffering as subject to human explanation, foresight and mastery. Applications of exact science to technology perpetuate this worldview (66-76). Denying the uncertain qualities of suffering tends to numb us to religious experience as we cease to recognize needs for divine grace. Failing to appreciate the presence of one “contingency,” suffering, eclipses the presence of grace, another contingency outside human control (78).

Ricoeur identifies a problematic interpretive turn starting in the Renaissance that suppressed the presence of suffering in the biblical text and distanced readers from its sacred meanings in a way comparable to the eclipse of grace and suffering as contingencies today. This shift is not something Ricoeur correlates with modern technology. However, it, like modern uses of technology, can be understood as a manifestation of ways Western culture suppresses suffering and contingencies. As Ricoeur describes, a theology based on a linear concept of history was applied to the Bible that assumed the book is one great narrative about human salvation, rather than a complex collection of diverse discourses and narratives that require individual attention. This historical approach to scripture tended to flatten out the text so that each passage is considered to carry equal significance to the others (237).
Ricoeur draws a correlation between acknowledging the thematic complexities of the text and appreciating the presence of suffering in its narratives. Blindness to the significance of individual narratives and their structures obscures the suffering that is represented. As Ricoeur explains, it “tends to abolish the peripeties, dangers, failures, and horrors of history for the sake of a consoling overview provided by the providential schema of this grandiose narrative” such that “Concordance finally conquers discordance” (238).

Paradoxes and unresolved questions in scripture are covered over by an artificially optimistic narrative. Forgetting the suffering of the past in this way perpetuates numbness to sources of evil we face ourselves. Failure to engage narratives personally is something Ricoeur begins to correlate with the exploitation of the natural world. As he explains:

The destruction of any genuine sense of tradition and authority in conjunction with the abusive prevalence of the will to dominate, exploit, and manipulate the natural environment of humankind—and consequently human beings themselves—amounts to an increase in forgetfulness, especially of the past sufferings of humankind, which is the ultimate cause of the impinging death of the capacity for storytelling. In that sense the fight for a ‘rebirth of narrative’ … is a specifically Christian task. (238)

In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur similarly suggests that forgetfulness of the sacred and hierophanies in nature is a price we pay for our mastery of nature in order to stave off hunger (349) (we might extend this to avoiding physical
suffering in general). Ricoeur resists tracing a clearly defined source for the overturning of religious traditions and the formation of exploitive practices now part of Western culture. Yet he does suggest that forgetting past challenges and disconnecting ourselves from personally interpreting religious and other narratives perpetuate these problems. Reconnecting with scripture is a possible way to help our culture remember the suffering of past generations and become more sensitive to the continued presence of suffering in our own, including human and non-human suffering caused by exploitive uses of technology. Our capacities to perceive sacredness in nature and other human lives is strongly tied to our abilities to interpret religious narratives personally. Much as Borgmann describes, grace or sacredness in religious faith and the phenomenological world are hidden when we fail to engage the meaning of suffering religiously and as something that escapes our mastery (75-79).

RICOEUR’S ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT

The first step in finding solutions to the problem of technology, Heidegger suggests in “The Question Concerning Technology,” is to engage its essence, to attempt to see the ways it shapes our relationships with the world by thinking deeply about it. Only then might we begin to engage the world honestly and escape its enframing essence (336-37). Heidegger suggests that to confront the problem of technology, we can do so in “a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology, and on the other, fundamentally different from it”
Art and poetry work well for this purpose. To question technology through engaging art is a way of acknowledging that our culture has failed to “guard and preserve” art’s revealing of itself and of truth to us (341). This is a way of breaking out of technological paradigms by deliberately recognizing what resists enframing: the personal, contextual revealing of truths about living art offers its audience.

Like art, scripture might serve as a way of breaking out of tendencies to suppress contingencies. Interpretation of scripture is also a techne, a creative process that can be compared to technology, as well as a kind of revealing which is “fundamentally different from [modern technology].” Like art, scripture is something that our culture has sometimes failed to guard the “essential unfolding of” (341). Scripture, like art, is something with poetic reference to our being in the world (our relationships with the world and with others in it) (Ricoeur Figuring 42-45). Careful consideration of how hermeneutic relationships with scripture work, or how sacred texts reveal themselves to us, might serve as an additional way to challenge technological reductions of the sacred.

In his essay published in Figuring the Sacred, “On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1—2:4a” Ricoeur uses the creation narrative to demonstrate how using one mode of explanation for the text’s meanings is never enough to exhaust possible ways of interpreting the text that the text itself invites. Genetic analysis, or analysis that traces the cultural and historical origins of ideas in the scriptures in order to interpret them, can be challenged by careful structural analysis that reveals meanings not apparent when one only considers the cultural sources of the
text. Genetic and structural analysis only begin to point to a deeper kind of analysis—personal interpretation of the text that searches for how symbols and themes in the narrative extend levels of reference in the world of the reader (139-40). As I suggested, White’s perspective on the Genesis creation narrative is limited because it is a genetic explanation for cultural events. Ricoeur’s interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative demonstrates that there is reason to understand the story as non-anthropocentric and focused on the role of nature in creation when it is interpreted with care.

When a cultural/historical approach to explaining the text is taken, Ricoeur suggests, perspectives of possible connections within the text are limited. Gerhard von Rad argues that, based on a Jewish myth about a struggle against the dragon of chaos, God’s absolving of chaos in His act of creation is intended to be woven into the later themes about salvation throughout the Bible; it is a “prologue” to the salvation of God’s people (132). But von Rad also writes that passages in the Psalms that show an interest in how the cosmos bears witness of God should not be tied to redemption themes in creation because they are of Egyptian origin, passed on to the Israelites by “travelling teachers of wisdom” (von Rad qtd. in Ricoeur 132). As Ricoeur says, this culturally-determined perspective of the theme of the cosmos bearing witness of God in Judeo-Christian scripture requires readers to hold the text’s interest in creation theology “at a distance” rather than to treat is as a vital topic in itself. Using such a perspective, one should focus on non-human parts of creation only when they concern human
salvation. The creation of man is the sole focus and crowning event of the creation account, which appears to build up to this point (131-32).

However, Ricoeur describes, cultural and historical perspectives must always be checked by careful observation of structures of the text that allow us to interpret the narratives anew. In relation to the creation narrative, he explains, “Unless we pay attention to the text itself, we will not be attentive to the counteraccents by which it resists any simple ordering in terms of the creation of humankind.” Themes in the narrative, particularly separation in the act of creation and images surrounding the ruach of God, challenge an anthropocentric reading of the text (134). The creation account in Genesis cannot be, as it is for White, explained through an understanding of culture or the history of the text. We must look at the narratives more carefully to interpret it for ourselves, letting its meanings extend to us personally, allowing it to turn out “one way or another” rather than forcing it to cohere to one historical explanation. Not only the historical medieval readings as Jeremy Cohen suggests, but also the narrative itself point toward a non-anthropocentric reading.

It is through separation that God both creates the earth and orders chaos. In the act of creation, separation is not only a manifestation of God’s violent dispelling of disorder, as in the Jewish myth about the dragon, but also a manifestation of the meditative wisdom demonstrated by God as He ordered creation (142). Ricoeur’s religious understanding of the narrative’s past interpretations enhances his ability to interpret the text anew. Through the theme of separation, he explains, readers can link God’s power over chaos as a
redemptive act with the theme of creation bearing witness of his wisdom in Psalms. This later theme can be cross-referenced with the salvation themes in the creation account in such a way that the central messages about God’s saving power do not work independently from the principle that the natural world bears witness of His creative acts.

We find another connection between salvation in creation and manifestation of the divine in the cosmos in the themes surrounding the Hebrew word *ruach*. The same spirit or breath, or *ruach* of God wanders over the waters in the act of creation, and provides man with the breath of life and salvation. The *ruach Elohim* is also that way God manifests Himself to save his people in war. These images of God as creator and savior, Ricoeur suggests, might teach us about a special link between how nature and the proclamation of salvation both reveal the divine in connection with the proverbial passages that von Rad attributed to Egyptian culture:

… [T]his theme of the cosmic peregrination of wisdom, which emerges in Proverbs and Job, is in fact an ancient theme of wisdom. Might it not then be the function of wisdom to assure the linkage between the values of salvation and the cosmic values? Is it not the same *ruach* that moves over the waters and that stirs among the people? Was not the same breath that settled upon a holy people after having conquered all obstacles already at work with the first word? If this be so, we need to say that a cosmic
exploration in the style of wisdom is just as ancient as is attending to the historical aspect of the *ruach*. (142)

Divine wisdom, or revelation of the sacred, connects the cosmic-centered and the redemptive themes in the Old Testament. God’s wisdom manifests itself in both, challenging assumptions that creation is not a focal point in his plan of redemption and in Old Testament narratives. Historical explanations of religious meanings put us in danger of missing the full significance of the creation narrative. God’s wisdom wanders and appears mysteriously and inexplicably through both the natural world and the narratives of scriptures through his breath, or his word. The Old Testament text suggests that divine wisdom is a link between the salvation and commandments proclaimed in scripture, and the sacredness manifest in nature. In the natural world and through God’s word, divine wisdom appears unexpectedly and personally. It serves as a constant contingency in our lives if we are sensitive to it. As Ricoeur suggests, its movement provides us with a model for interpretation of the sacred. He writes, “Interpretation … models itself on this movement, which is the very movement of wisdom …” (142). Perceiving sacred meanings in interpretation involves becoming sensitive and receptive to the unexpected nature of its wandering—in the text, and also in the phenomenological world.

The contingent quality of sacred wisdom uncovered in themes surrounding *ruach* is also addressed in David Abram’s argument about the sacredness of breath and wind in Hebraic interpretive traditions. Abram ties the absence of vowels in the Hebrew Torah with the sacredness of God’s breath in acts of
creation and a sense of the sacredness of the air in Hebrew culture. The missing vowels in the text can be considered symbolic of how interpretation must be active and open. The words were incomplete without the active voice of a reader, whose breath made sacred meanings audible (243). The insufficiency of the words without interpretation, Abram argues, made it so that the text did not dominate over relationships with the phenomenological world. The same mysterious manifestation of the divine that vitalized interpretation, God’s ruach, also enlivened the earth through the wind (242-3). Interpretations, he suggests, were also tied to a sense of the divine as it manifested itself in nature. As Abram explains, “Just as the consonantal letters of a traditional Hebrew text depend, for their communicative power, upon the sounded breath that animates them, so the divine letters and letter combinations that structure the physical universe are dependent on the divine breath that continually utters them forth. All things vibrate with ‘the Breath of His Mouth’” (248).

Ruach links three things that can be easily reduced to things within human explanation and mastery by the essence of technology Heidegger describes: divine words, or scripture; the presence of divinity or sacred meanings in the natural world (whether through manifestation, or simply belief that God’s influence is present in the world); and the presence of suffering as something unforeseen in the natural world. Like the divine, the wind is something humanity cannot control and is subjected to as part of living in the world. Heidegger uses the wind as an example of natural forces that resist mastery. The windmill is subject to the wind’s contingency, while water defies the turbine’s attempts to trap its energy
consistently (320). The wind is not only a contingent source of energy, it also causes adversity. It blows ships in the wrong direction. It brings pestilence and storms. Its chill can aggravate illness and prevent necessary work from being performed. This is not to equate adversity with the divine, but to suggest simply that both are presences in the world that resist technology’s reductions of events as subject to human control, and that it is difficult to recognize the uncertain quality of one if we deny that of the other.

Whether and how much the divine has a hand in the presence of suffering is not a question I will explore. However, we can connect Ricoeur’s and Abram’s observations about ruach to what early Christian theologians suggested about the book of nature. As Augustine suggested, suffering is mysterious in a way comparable to the concealment of divine meanings in nature. We do not always know why God, who dispels chaos and has power to save his people, allows certain forms of suffering to persist. Because we cannot fully account for the causes of suffering, we are not justified in blaming the divine. God, Augustine suggested, may have wise and hidden purposes in allowing physical suffering and evil into the world, and because of this suffering is part of what we must accept if we wish to perceive sacred meanings at hand in God’s creations (qtd. in Groh 33). As Origen suggested, we can correlate passages of scripture that are difficult to understand or accept with parts of nature that seem evil (qtd. in Benjamins 14). To accept such things is to become more receptive of divine mysteries. Accepting suffering as never fully explicable can help us open ourselves to perceiving the sacred in scripture and nature.
THE WIND AND WISDOM IN AS YOU LIKE IT

As You Like It can be read in ways that demonstrate how the way we interpret the presence of evil and suffering is connected to capacities to find religious meanings and hope. Although I will not thoroughly address the Edenic themes in this chapter here (chapter four will include more discussion of them), it is useful to note here that the play is interested in the events in the Genesis creation narrative. The conflicts between Oliver and Orlando and the two Dukes allude frequently to the conflict between Cain and Abel, the first heinous occurrence of evil in the Old Testament. It is “Adam,” a servant, who accompanies Orlando into the wilderness as he faces trials, much as Adam was cast out of Eden to face an adverse wilderness with Eve. We also see a connection to the creation and fall of Adam in themes that resemble what Ricoeur and Abram suggest about ruach, or the correlation between divine breath, human breath, and wind that we find in the Old Testament. Traces of divine wisdom and hope unfold in the forest, where suffering is also present. The play approaches how the reception of the sacred is challenged by the presence of suffering as something that resists human control, including through imagery surrounding the winter’s wind. The characters are faced with cold, fatigue, the threat of exile and death, and hunger. Adam’s breath, something breathed into the biblical Adam him by God in the creation account, is coming near its end as he faces winter with Orlando in the forest in his old age.

Sometimes suffering tempts the characters to give up their search for meaning and hope. Sometimes it leads them to try to suppress it in order to derive sources of hope and force things to work out for their good. When this happens,
hope is either completely out of reach or empty of meaning. In order to find genuine sources of meaning in their relationships, the characters must learn to be open to contingencies they face in nature and in human relationships (both suffering and grace).

Grace and wisdom seem to peregrinate almost unnoticeably through the forest, like the wind. Amiens, one of Duke Senior’s men, sings of how the wind, although sometimes bitter, is less “unkind” than other kinds of adversities. The wind can at once be interpreted as a symbol of divine grace and adversity or suffering:

> Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
> Thou art not so unkind
> As man's ingratitude;
> Thy tooth is not so keen,
> Because thou art not seen,
> Although thy breath be rude. (II.vii.174-79)

Here, the wind has a mouth (teeth and breath) that resembles the imagery surrounding *ruach* in the Old Testament, in which God’s breath is a source of divine power in the natural world and divine words. But, of course, the wind here also represents the physical adversities that the Duke’s brotherhood faces in the forest. In the Forest of Arden, the Duke and his men feel both a sense of peace in being removed from the court and through their formation of a charitable and loyal band, but they also feel the sting of sacrifices that come with living in the forest. Their sacrifice is an act of love and loyalty to the Duke to accompany him
(not unlike Adam’s choice to accept the fruit which brought adversity and death and follow Eve) into the forest. They face “No enemy / But winter and rough weather.” Even though the “green holly” that Amiens goes on to praise and may prick, life in the forest is a “jolly” compared to living among feigning friends (II.vii.180-81). At least the wind’s bite is honest, even if it hurts (much as, Touchstone’s bride Audrey thanks God she is honest, even if she is foul, or plain, and Rosalind and Celia discuss how “those [nature] makes honest” tend to be made “ill-favoredly” [III.iii.33-34, I.ii.37-42])..

The peace and grace of the forest come at the cost of being subject to struggles. The wind is a symbol not only of the contingent qualities of adversities but also the grace and peace felt in their charitable brotherhood. Although Amiens bids it to blow (showing his willingness to endure it), the wind may stop, start, and turn wherever it will.

To some degree, Amiens upholds a cynical attitude like Jacques. He sarcastically responds to the Duke’s reading of nature by saying the Duke is lucky he can “translate” misfortune so pleasantly (II.i.18-20). Here he may not entirely bid the wind to blow where it will. He wills the wind to blow almost as if he wills the grace found in the Duke’s brotherhood to persist, something also not in his control. But at least Amiens willingly accepts the wind as a facet of the presence of adversity. Unlike Jacques, he makes a distinction between human evils and adversities in nature, accepting those in nature without bitterness. His “reading” of nature is open to conceal meanings in suffering. Because the source of the wind’s unkindness cannot be seen, unlike human evils, Amiens will not become resentful toward it.
The Duke’s reference to the wind is less ambiguous and less bitter toward humanity. Rather than a victim of “man’s ingratitude” he feels he is in fellowship with Adam’s suffering to the extent that he can bear up the “penalty of Adam” without feeling its sting. The chilly winter’s wind is a source of religious wisdom for the Duke, much like “tongues in trees” or “books in the running brooks:”

Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which when it bites and blows upon my body,
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say,
‘This is no flattery: these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am.’ (II.i.5-11)

We can compare the Duke’s perspective of the wind (and to some degree, Amiens’s) to an open, personal interpretive mode that “follows” the unpredictable wisdom of text in the way Ricoeur describes. Unlike others in the play, the Duke and Amiens do not reduce their experiences by equating human evils with the suffering they face in the natural world. As Amiens says, the wind is “not seen;” it is a force of nature that is strongly felt but never visible except through the ways it alters the movement of other things (much as the presence of sacred meanings can alter the way we see an entire text, or the world). It cannot be reduced to human choices and evils. Like grace or religious meanings in interpretation, we encounter it very personally; it is physically enveloping (much as the Duke describes it biting his body). Like the ruach Elohim, it wanders. The Duke is
willing to accept the wandering manifestation of the wind, even when it causes him suffering, because he accepts its mysterious nature and causes. The wind is not a sermon, but a “chiding,” something that restrains Duke Senior from doing evil rather than tempting him to perpetuate it by causing others to suffer. Although it is painful to receive, it “[counsels]” him “feelingly” (as if earnestly) allowing him to feel “what [he is].” We can also compare the Duke’s thoughts to early conceptualizations of the book of nature that suggested that to perceive religious meanings in nature, one must accept seemingly evil things as having mysterious purposes.

The Duke’s words, like Amiens’s, address the question of how we respond when nature faces us with the most difficult kind of contingency we face in nature: suffering. We can interpret this in light of how Albert Borgmann builds on Heidegger’s argument that enframing and mastery make us insensitive to the holy. Borgmann argues that contemporary culture’s rejection of suffering leads us to reject the contingency of grace and to be unreceptive to the West’s Christian religious heritage. Failing to perceive how suffering is outside of human control tends to lead us to become more indifferent to receiving divine revelation and grace (65, 78-79). As Ricoeur suggests, God’s grace and wisdom is a something that “wanders” from our perspectives as readers; it is an uncertainty we face as we interpret scripture. As Borgmann argues, to restore a desire to sense God’s grace in our world, we need to seek a sense of “significant contingency,” all that is unexpected and uncertain, to acknowledge that technology does not bring the world, and particularly suffering, under our mastery (65). In light of Borgmann’s
argument, we might interpret the Duke’s reception of suffering and grace at once as showing how suffering is the “twin of grace” (Borgmann 78), or that the Duke perceives divine grace because he understands that not all suffering is not to be repressed, and serves the purpose of humbling instructing him.

Jacques’s and Orlando’s experiences also suggest how acknowledging suffering and grace go hand-in-hand. They each use questionable metaphors that fail to appreciate the wind’s contingent nature and its connection with sacred wisdom. Jacques says that he wishes he could spread his foolish wit with the power of the wind:

… I must have liberty

Withal, as large a charter as the wind,

To blow on whom I please, for so fools have … (II.vii.47-49)

Jacques has just decided that instead of being a melancholy cynic, he wants to take up the identity of a fool and wear a “motley coat” (II.vii.43-44). He has encountered Touchstone’s playful and carefree approach to life, and perceives some fragment of wisdom in this alternative approach, in which Touchstone reveals the foolishness of others through his own foolish wit (like a “whetstone” whose “dullness” can either deaden or sharpens others’ “wits” [I.ii.45-56]. Jacques also says that Touchstone’s brain is “as dry as the remainder of a biscuit after a voyage” yet nevertheless “crammed with observation” [II.vii.38-41]). Jacques’s metaphor is opposed to the Duke’s description of the wind as something that spreads religious instruction. Here Jacques describes himself as being like the wind in spreading his foolish wit, but human foolishness does not have the same
mysterious qualities as divine wisdom. To Jacques, foolishness pervades all of humanity, even the wise (II.iv.53-54). He treats it much like suffering in nature; he wants others to recognize it (for example, he invites Orlando to “rail against [their] mistress the world, and all [their] misery” together [III.i.278-79]), but he find no means of aiding human folly. Suffering and foolishness are not unforeseen, but pervasive and irremediable. Jacques sees the revealing of the foolishness of the wise as a “medicine” for an “infected world” (II.vii.53-61). In response to the Duke’s brotherhood’s song praising the goodness of their life in the forest and inviting others to join them where they face “No enemy / But winter and rough weather” (II.v.1-8), Jacques creates his own ballad about how all who have been forced to become fools through adversity can join with him and he will reveal how all men are fools (II.v.38-57). Jacques is not open to the possibility that suffering, as a contingency, is paired with more-than-human wisdom as a contingency outside of his power to unveil at will. As he fails to sense the possibility of deeper meanings behind suffering, he also fails to appreciate wisdom as something unpredictably encountered like the wind.

Touchstone’s approach to adversities in relationships is genuinely foolish, and reveals the wisdom in others’ actions in the play. His response to suffering is to avoid it altogether. As he is about to marry Audrey and Jacques is attempting to convince him that he should not be married by the parish priest, Oliver Martext, Touchstone says:

    Farewell, good Master Oliver: not

    ‘O sweet Oliver,
O brave Oliver,

Leave me not behind thee;

but

‘Wind away,

Be gone, I say,

I will not to wedding with thee.’ (III.iii.98-105)

The three lines starting with “Oh sweet Oliver,” refer to a popular ballad, though the last three appear to be unique to Touchstone (422n). The use of the name Oliver, though it refers to the parish priest, “Oliver Martext,” who is to marry Touchstone and Audrey, can here be understood in connection with Orlando’s older brother Oliver in the play. Oliver is one of the figures associated with hatred, envy, and all the troubles that come in human relationships. Touchstone rejects the original lyrics of the love ballad, saying goodbye to “Oliver” as if he is saying goodbye to the risk of all such adversities in marrying Audrey. Even though for now, Touchstone puts off the wedding as if he is following Jacques’s counsel to have a proper ceremony that will keep the pair from separation, Touchstone has also just told Jacques that “being not well married,” or not having a formal ceremony, pleases him because he will be able to better justify leaving Audrey (III.iii.90-94). Audrey is “foul” or plain, yet honest, or loyal. Unlike Amiens, who prefers the harsh yet seemingly honest quality of the forest to dishonest friends at court, Touchstone does not at first like the combination of honest, or loyal and plain, or mundane. He tells Audrey he’d rather have her “feign[ing]” than honest, and that to place honesty into a plain woman is like
putting “good meat into an unclean dish” (III.iii.16-37). Disloyalty in ordinary relationships seems inevitable to Touchstone; the mundane and adverse are not mixed with the truthful and desirable. Touchstone’s approach is to flee problems when they arrive and ruin shallow pleasure. It seems in this same spirit that Touchstone says he will not “marry” the “wind.” He will not commit himself to what cannot be controlled by his personal choices and that presents him with everyday challenges. Touchstone’s marriage with Audrey can be juxtaposed with a later scene when Celia falls in love unexpectedly with Oliver (V.ii.1-12). Oliver is reconciled with Orlando, which transforms him. Oliver’s alteration challenges Touchstone’s assumption that even the worst relationships should be abandoned. A person as seemingly evil as Oliver can change without expectation and become worth falling in love with (even for a princess like Celia). Touchstone’s approach also contrasts with Rosalind’s and Orlando’s experience coming to accept the mundane realities of relationships, which I will discuss below.

Jacques’s and Touchstone’s references to the wind reflect their unwillingness to accept adversities and contingencies. This prevents them from engaging in more meaningful relationships with others. We see how learning to embrace both hope and adversity as personally encountered contingencies alters “readings” of nature in the experience of Orlando. Before he develops a friendship with the disguised Rosalind, Orlando, like Jacques, misconstrues the personal way the wind is encountered in a poem he writes for Rosalind:

‘From the east to western Inde,

No jewel is like Rosalind.
Her worth, being mounted on the wind,
Through all the world bears Rosalind.
All the pictures fairest lin’d
Are but black to Rosalind.
Let no face be kept in mind
But the fair of Rosalind.’ (III.ii.88-95)

The wind spreads Orlando’s Petrarchan idealization throughout the whole world in Orlando’s metaphor. It is as totalizing, impersonal, and predictable as his poetic images of Rosalind and his idealized hopes of a relationship with her. In both Jacques’s and Orlando’s metaphors, the wind is something instrumental and controllable to be tapped for their own use. But of course, the wind cannot be mounted in this way, much as real wind cannot truly ever be fully tapped as an energy resource.

Orlando’s use of the wind in his metaphor resembles his ideas about suffering and hope in his love poems. He isolates the fragile, generic descriptions of Rosalind’s qualities and love from his fears as if they would break his hopes. Orlando wishes to avoid the pain that comes with having a close relationship, just as he wishes to avoid the hunger and physical suffering he faces in the forest. For him, relationships with nature and others have often been about mastery. He has been mastered himself by two “tyrant[s],” Frederick and Oliver (I.ii.88), who betrays him and forces him to live in the forest. There, Orlando seeks to alleviate his and Adam’s hunger through threats similar to those he has received; it is “The thorny point / Of bare distress” that leads him to such measures (II.vii.94-99). A
desire to master suffering also appears to lead him to create superficially exaggerated descriptions of Rosalind. No love could be painful or disloyal with such a superlatively perfect woman, whom Orlando paints as the only woman worth loving in the entire world. Only when Orlando more fully accepts that certain risks are outside his control and thus master him in a sense is he capable of perceiving personal reasons for him to hope. Rosalind tests the sincerity of Orlando’s commitment by facing him with the dull interactions of daily life in relationships. By disguising herself as a young shepherd, “Ganymede,” and informing him of all the unpleasant, and painful things about love, Rosalind compels Orlando to face the fears that uphold his naïve idealizations. Once he marries her, she argues, Rosalind will be an awful wife by weeping when he is happy, laughing when he wants to sleep, and becoming irritatingly jealous (IV.i.146-56). Orlando’s response to this is simply, “O, but she is wise” (IV.i.159). Only accepting the possibility of problems arising and committing himself to Rosalind despite risks allows Orlando to recognize his own awareness of the uncertain and unexpected presence of wisdom and hope. It is within the personal context of a relationship with Rosalind (coming to know her, it seems, behind the disguise) that Orlando comes to have genuine hope.

Jacques overcomes his reductive approach to human foolishness similarly by learning to be receptive to unexpected sources of wisdom. His desire to spread foolishness and cynicism is overcome by his desire to pursue an unexpected source of religious preaching, the religious man in the woods with whom Frederick met. Jacques sees there is “much to learn” from the teacher (V.iv.184-
Rather than dressing as a “motley fool” and perpetuating foolishness, Jacques now wishes to meditate on religious teachings in Duke Senior’s “abandoned cave,” coming to know the natural world from a new perspective (V.iv.195-6). The Duke’s sanctuary, where he had seen himself as a fellow in Adam’s suffering, becomes Jacques’s desired place of refuge. That Jacques now wants to enter this space himself seems to signify his decision to take up a relation to the natural world more like the Duke’s, which is open to perceiving hidden meanings amidst suffering. Jacques’s choice to identify his own foolishness seems to have prepared him on some level to receive religious wisdom. Recognition that certain sources of meaning or wisdom may master us makes way for wisdom. One reason that the phenomenological world, including the arts and nature, demand our attention as something “commanding” is that as we engage them, we recognize they are not within our full control. To play an instrument, for example, is to engage that something is “arduous to master.” Even though live amateur music is technically inferior to perfected stereo sound, only the former can instruct us in this way (Borgmann 30-34). Touchstone acknowledges the presence of hope and meaning in the midst of adversities as the play draws close to its end. Although Audrey is in some ways “ill-favor’d” she is his own, and he will “swear” himself to her, because “honesty dwells like a miser, in a poor-house” much like a “pearl” in a “foul oyster” (V.iv.55-61). Audrey’s loyalty can be compared to nature’s commanding presence. Though Audrey is not ideal, her love masters Touchstone’s foolish propensities. This idea is comparable to Rosalind’s image of Oliver having “overthrown / More than [his] enemies” when she falls in love with
him (I.ii.253-54). Paradoxically, while love is something we attempt to bring under mastery, it is experienced as something that masters us, not unlike our relationships with nature, or attempts to learn to play an instrument. Touchstone’s pearl analogy is not unlike the Duke’s readings religious wisdom in nature. Perhaps Touchstone only conceals his understanding of this wisdom earlier, or perhaps he learns this as she becomes more “his [own],” which teaches him to understand the relationship demands something more of him.

Orlando’s and Jacques’s choices to let go of attempts to master the meaning of their relationships by acknowledging what is uncertain (as well as to reinterpret their relationships in the context of unfolding events) can be compared to a choice we can experience in our perspectives of religious language. Following and listening for the wisdom, or sacred meanings, of the text involves letting go of the desire to control or predict them, or to credit meanings to ourselves as interpreters. Writing about preaching, Ricoeur discusses what it means to learn how to hear religious meanings:

*Listening excludes founding oneself.* The movement toward listening requires … a letting go, the abandoning of a more subtle and more tenacious pretension than that of onto-theological knowledge. It requires giving up … the human self will to mastery, sufficiency, and autonomy. (224)

Heidegger suggests we must give up the will to master nature if we are to attempt to shatter the enframing essence of technology. Only returning to more personal approaches to “techne” (creating as it was before modern technology) such as
poetry, might allow us to reveal our relationships with the world in true ways (339-41). In a similar way, only learning to interpret scripture personally rather than objectively may allow us to reveal meanings in scripture. According to Ricoeur, in order to perceive sacred meanings, we must let go of our will to master religious language. Interpretation is indebted to something more than the reader or even the author is responsible for, something never fully disclosed at one time. We see this in the play in how unexpected meanings reveal themselves in a way that is not reducible to the will of the characters.

Interpretation is an unpredictable art partly because religious meanings are unveiled not only through themes in the text, but is also through the lived world of the reader. Jacques and Orlando do not learn to “read” nature’s meanings well until their readings become more personal. They both come to know the “book of nature” through cross-referencing “the world of the text,” or nature, with their personal experiences. Orlando comes to know Rosalind and find hope through new relationships with Rosalind and the Duke that help him transform his tendencies to master nature and see it as malevolent. Jacques’s acceptance of unforeseen, but meaningful religious hope allows him to accept life in the forest with peace.

The idea that both the sacred phenomenological world and themes of salvation in scripture manifest divine wisdom that Ricoeur writes about plays out in a direct way in our interpretive relationships with scripture. Religious meanings unfold in both the text and in the life of the reader. Interpretation of the sacred can only grow as these two “texts” are cross-referenced. As he explains, the meaning
of scriptural narratives “is not confined to the so-called inside of the text. It occurs at the intersection between the world of the text and the world of the readers” (Figuring 240). What the medieval book of nature suggests about the hermeneutic between scripture and the phenomenological world is similar to this idea; the text invites us to engage both worlds as we uncover new meanings. As Ricoeur suggests, interpreting means, “to seek, in all other levels of signification crossed by the same signifier—the cosmological level, [and] the social level … the same functioning of meaning” (Figuring 143). Sacred meanings in scripture reveal themselves only as we are perceptive to their connection to meanings that unfold in our lives. The sacredness of the text lies not in its language but in this function to transform the possible relationships we have with the world (Figuring 240, 243). The text refers not directly to “manipulable objects” in the real world, but to ways of being in the world, to ways of relating, through an indirect, second level of poetic reference (Figuring 221-23).

We can compare the “letting go” in interpretation and the “peregrination” of unforeseen revelation in scripture that Ricoeur describes to the “wandering” that Martin Heidegger describes in humanity’s search for the meaning of being throughout history. In Heidegger’s essay “The Anaximander Fragment,” he argues that the search for meaning and the act of interpreting history reveals endless patterns of “errancy” or wandering in search of truth (26-27). Adding to Ricoeur’s argument, we might say that the search for meaning through interpretation in addition to the revelation of the sacred is something that tends to “peregrinate” as religious wisdom does. In Heidegger’s philosophy, interpretation
of the past and of ancient texts wanders because wherever truth manifests itself, it also withdraws. Things reveal themselves in a certain way at one time, and then pass away. Disorder, or the falling of things into chaos, is necessary for order to be established and things to continue to reveal themselves (46-47). Heidegger refers to every interpretation as a misinterpretation because there is no one narrative or perspective to explain the truth of the past; the complete meaning of being is never revealed at one given time (26). Discovering truths that do unfold at a certain time thus requires us to wander in search of them, to open ourselves to the possibility that truth might unfold in one way, or another. Because of this, static interpretations (including, for example, reductive human-centered readings of scripture) are always inadequate. As Ricoeur suggests, “frozen” interpretations of scripture that have dominated in Christianity’s past have been blind to the ever-changing way the text reveals what was at other times hidden. It was for instrumental purposes (to prevent heresy) that Christian churches tended to stifle personal interpretation (Figuring 69-72). They were unwilling to face the risks of incorrect interpretations that would come with encouraging individuals to read scripture in light of personal experience.

Heidegger suggests that Western culture has blinded itself to how beings normally unconceal and conceal themselves through time. This is evident in modern technology and science, which attempts to predetermine ways things are to be revealed or interpreted in the future, whether texts from the past, or nature (“Anaximander” 56-58). The West no longer recognizes the value of allowing chaos or disorder to occur at times in order to leave what might be revealed open
(“Anaximander” 46-48). We might compare this to Borgmann’s argument that we need to acknowledge suffering, a major facet of the chaos we encounter in our world, in order to interpret our Christian heritage openly (65-66, 78-79).

Heidegger suggests that earnest interpretation, or wandering, is something performed by opening ourselves to the possibilities of the future. Interpretation is always contextual, just as wandering places us in one space or another.

Medieval interpretations of the creation narrative suggest ways the account may inform our understanding of what it means to seek divine guidance in the midst of suffering and error. Once Adam and Eve are cast out, the narrative, (like other creation stories that approach the problem of evil and its sources [Ricoeur, Symbolism 356]), is about errantry, about human separation from the divine and wandering in search of divine wisdom due to human inadequacies, rather than exerting dominion and mastery. Seeking understanding of how to live in nature involves wandering in search of truth, facing risks that always come with interpreting.

Heidegger’s discussion in “The Anaximander Fragment” and medieval perspectives of Adam and Eve’s search for truth suggest how acknowledging contingencies is different from blind obedience or passive interpretation. Seeking moral direction and understanding demands that we actively search, even if this search inevitably involves periods of seemingly futile wandering. “Frozen” interpretations of the Bible are better models of inactive interpretation, although, paradoxically, they attempted mastery over the text and heresy. Deeper levels of reference and wisdom in scriptural narratives are left unengaged. Acknowledging
suffering as a contingency in nature can also be distinguished from passively responding to suffering and evil. Recognizing our failure to master suffering (and that instead, certain forms of suffering inevitably master us) should encompass seeking to do our best to respond morally to evil and suffering. We might best avoid immoral forms of mastery by learning what moral principles and which contingencies in the phenomenological we should allow to restrain us.

Even interpretation that is open to unexpected sacred meanings and oriented within a personal context involves uncertainty and risks. Inevitably, we make some mistakes. In the play, Duke Senior foolishly compares deer to citizens being murdered in their own city (II.i.21-25). This is ironic in light of the speech he has made about reading mysterious religious meanings in nature. Another example is how even though Orlando feels such love for Rosalind that no one can dissuade him from seeking her and expressing his love, he nevertheless fails at first in his attempts to poetically express his feelings about the friendship that has begun between them (III.ii.259-84, 373-99, III.ii.125-54). The implications of scripture in a given context are often not clear and obvious, and even when we try our best we may interpret poorly. But being open to ways our readings of scripture can challenge our views of the world or our past readings, as well as how our experiences might challenge these readings can help us learn to engage religious texts on new levels of meaning. Such openness may allow the text to speak to us with truthful moral meanings that might otherwise be drowned out.

We must allow “the world of the text” to inform our worlds as readers, and our
experiences in the phenomenological world to help form the meanings we derive from the text (Ricoeur, *Figuring* 240).

While personal interpretations may never be perfect, we draw further from the text if we take a distanced approach to the text and its interpretation. Distanced cultural and historical theories can never fully explain the significance of the text, its sources, or its influence on human society. As Ricoeur describes, when the text is cut away from personal religious interpretation, its meanings become dead. While believing that genetic explanations of the text, or its cultural roots and interpretive history, can make its meanings transparent to us, such discourses do not bring us closer to its sacred meanings (*Figuring* 220).

Objective approaches to scripture and its interpretation are sometimes unethical because they usually fail to engage the rhetorical structures of the text and the contexts in which the text has been interpreted (Fiorenza 13-16). By distancing themselves so much from the past, scholars cannot begin to make historical contexts intelligible. As Elizabeth Fiorenza points out, the Bible has been used to justify many forms of immorality in Western culture, including slavery, misogyny, waging war, and anti-Judaism (15). But if we are to take such issues up, including issues surrounding the environmental crisis, we should attempt to answer questions about how and why the text has been interpreted the way it has within certain contexts, and whether these were fair readings of the texts. As Fiorenza explains, “An ethics of historical reading changes the task of interpretation from finding out ‘what the text meant’ to the question of what kind of readings can do justice to the text in its historical contexts” (14). Reading the
text meaningfully involves taking the cultural contexts of past cultures into account. Evaluating past interpretations in this way, Fiorenza suggests, allows the text to speak to its readers anew, “mak[ing] the assimilation of the text to our own experience and interests more difficult and thereby keeps alive the "irritation" of the original text by challenging our own assumptions, world views, and practices” (14).

The kind of ethical approach described by Fiorenza applies to understanding Judeo-Christian texts and traditions in light of the environmental crisis. We need to be sensitive to the possibility that appropriate interpretation is subject to conditions, that it is contingent on the circumstances of its readers. As Heidegger suggests, doing so can help history to perform its function of revealing how interpretations of the past are a kind of wandering in search of truth, rather than definitive perspectives of texts and what they revealed to past generations (“Anaximander” 26). Fiorenza’s argument is affirmed by Ricoeur’s suggestion that in order to respond to our ancestors and their experiences ethically, we must be willing to interpret scripture with new eyes, in consideration of challenges faced in the past as well as those we face today, including exploitive uses of the natural world.
Grace is Perceptible Amidst Suffering:
Overcoming the Logic of Accusation

If scripture can play a special role in restoring capacities to respond to the sacred in nature, and if reconnecting with scriptural narratives can help us remember and become sensitive to the suffering of past generations and the immoral practices of our own, what does this mean for environmental perspectives of Judeo-Christian texts and traditions? Disassociating ourselves from the West’s religious heritage may lead us to perpetuate the immorality of our generation. It may only spread the forgetfulness of how to create moral relationships with the natural world. In this chapter, I will argue that in addition to this, it is important to avoid accusing definitive origins of the environmental crisis in order to engage the sacred in religious narratives and in the natural world.

Lynn White’s essay is interested in digging deeply into history to expose the cultural and historical sources of exploitive uses of technology (185-86). David Abram justifies identifying the logo-centrism of Hebrew and Greek cultures as the “origin” of the environmental crisis (93-95). Christopher Manes warns that “neglecting the origin” of nature’s “silence” is a dangerous way of sustaining immoral relationships with nature (16-17). Although understanding destructive cultural influences on relationships with the environment is a useful tool in helping contemporary culture make needed changes, searching for specific origins may be counterproductive. Identifying specific sources of evil may prove an unintentional way of supporting worldviews that affirm the immoral uses of
technology the environmental movement is designed to overthrow. Accusing origins of the environmental crisis might be dangerous specifically in relation to Judeo-Christian scripture, as I will continue to explain.

In theology and philosophy, a theodicy is a rational explanation for the presence of evil. Theodicies seek to explain the question: if the world and God are good, how is it that so much evil and suffering are present? Efforts to trace ultimate causes of moral catastrophes like the environmental crisis sometimes share assumptions with theodicy, including problematic ways of understanding evil and suffering. Western philosophy has traditionally conflated evil with suffering and assumed that satisfactory explanations for evil can be found. The structures of religious narratives challenge this in that they do not offer precise explanations for evil. Rather than seeking reasons for suffering and human evil, Ricoeur suggests in his essay “Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” our interest in the problem of evil and suffering should move from the realm of theory and theodicy to that of practice. Rather than the problem of evil, we should focus on questions concerning how to respond ethically to evil and suffering, a problem that religious narratives are suited to help us engage.

Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* can be considered a retelling of parts of the Genesis narrative surrounding Adam and Eve’s family and can help us address questions raised about human evil and immoral mastery raised in that narrative surrounding Adam and Eve’s family. The drama begins at a point parallel to when Adam and Eve have been exiled in the wilderness and their son Cain grows jealous of his brother Abel. Like the creation narrative, the play is interested in
examining sources of evil. Shakespeare’s story suggests how definite causes of suffering and evil are evasive. Instead of identifying specific sources of evil, the narrative focuses on how individuals rationalize choosing to exploit others and the natural world. *As You Like It*, like the Cain and Abel narrative, suggests that evil is a pattern of self-deceptive accusation and revenge. This chapter will interpret *As You Like It* in light of Jean-Luc Marion’s Christian writings on evil and suffering, specifically his essay “Evil in Person,” which explores the special significance of suffering in Christianity and the morally destructive qualities of accusation and revenge. Evil, Marion argues, works on the assumption that suffering demands suppression, which is only possible through blaming a scapegoat and taking control of suffering by returning evil. From a Christian perspective, only Christ’s willingness to suffer and resist accusing others offers an alternative to evil’s logic, which is also suggested in Shakespeare’s exploration of evil. Reading the Cain and Abel account in connection with Marion’s work and Shakespeare’s retelling, we find that the narrative does not affirm evil’s justifications to exploit and take revenge, but teaches how to avoid falling into such attempts at mastery.

Theodicy-like searches to trace reasons for suffering and evil can be self-deceptive and destructive of our abilities to make moral choices. Responding fully to suffering does not necessarily entail searching for and constraining sources of evil and suffering. As Marion’s Christian phenomenology suggests, doing so often actually stifles capacities to act ethically in the face of suffering. Instead, the search for moral ways to respond to suffering, including in relationships with
nature, is more a matter of discerning what actions are immoral expressions of mastery, and which are appropriate responses to suffering and evil. Christian narratives bear special implications concerning how to respond ethically to evil and suffering. Reconnecting with these narratives, rather than disassociating ourselves from them, might help us challenge tendencies toward mastery, and even help us to perceive moral constraints in our relationships with the natural world.

As early Christians suggested as they conceptualized the book of nature, despite our inability to trace causes or meanings in suffering and human evil, as we engage scripture, we can become sensitive to the presence of grace amidst suffering and evil in nature and humanity. From a Christian perspective, grace encompasses the presence of the sacred in our world. More specifically, it includes divine compassion for human suffering, and human capacities to respond ethically to suffering without taking retribution. Christian narratives, and particularly the suffering of Christ, teach that compassionate responses to evil and suffering that refuse to accuse and take revenge are possible in the face of any form of suffering and human evil. In response to the evils of the environmental crisis, Christian narratives might also help us find strength to resist blaming past generations, which goes hand in hand with efforts to resist responding to suffering by exploiting others and the natural world.

Unmasking the logic of evil and its tendency to reduce all evil and suffering to specific causes bears special relevance in the environmental crisis. From Marion’s perspective, the essence of technology follows evil’s logic.
Modern technology’s immoral practices, including its excessive measures taken to repress suffering and its deception that suffering can be traced to specific human actions, can be considered expressions of the greater problem of human desire for mastery. The will for mastery and suppression of suffering runs deeper than any one cultural influence. Rather than the question of who or what to blame, the larger issue concerning desire for mastery over nature in the West is one of moral practice. For this reason, environmental writers should be careful not to buy into assumptions that accusation is a road to reconciliation. Turning to Judeo-Christian narratives for moral guidance and giving up desires to trace precise origins of the environmental crisis are legitimate moral responses to the West’s exploitive practices.

FALSE GROUNDS FOR SEEKING THE ORIGIN OF EVIL IN THEODICY

In the last chapter, I discussed how we can perpetuate indifference to suffering and evil by forgetting its presence in narratives and in history, which prevents us from reading religious texts carefully. Another way religious meanings in the narratives can be dismissed is engaging them for the sake of seeking causes of evil. This may include approaching religious texts as sources of cultural problems, which is comparable to interpreting scripture with the goal of making propositions concerning the origins of suffering. Such approaches are encompassed in theodicy.

In “Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” Paul Ricoeur discusses why seeking explanations for human evil in theodicy has long proven
confusing in Western thought. The major mistake that is made is equating suffering with evil itself. The first stage of thinking about the problems of evil and suffering traditionally starts with religious narratives, particularly creation accounts. In interpreting these, it seems natural to seek logical explanations for suffering and evil. However, while religious narratives provide groundwork through which to talk about the beginnings of evil and suffering (in that they are interested in the origins of the world, and raise the question why humanity suffers), they pose a multitude of different possible readings to explain why humans suffer and choose evil, something evident in more than the Judeo-Christian tradition. The search for the origins of evil through religious narratives and myths, Ricoeur writes, is likely a “blind alley” (251).

The second level is “wisdom,” or seeking explanations for personal suffering. At this stage, seeking understanding of evil and suffering becomes a kind of “complaint” in which one asks “Why me?” As we find with religious narratives, concrete solutions evade us. Ricoeur uses the book of Job as an example of how such questions fail to be answered. Job seeks, but receives no rational explanation for his individual suffering, but only the promise of receiving divine grace (251-52).

The next stage of contemplating evil is “gnosis,” which brings the question ‘why do I suffer?’ to a new level, asking, what is the cause of evil and suffering in general? Gnosis, or assertions of esoteric knowledge about the origins of evil, serves as the link between wisdom and theodicy, and began with Gnostic thought and its influence on Christian theology. As Ricoeur explains:
Thinking would not have moved on from wisdom to theodicy if Gnosticism had not elevated speculation to the level of a gigantomachy, where the forces of good are engaged in a merciless struggle with the armies of evil ... From this perspective, we might say that Western thought is in debt to Gnosticism, broadly conceived, for having conceived the problem of evil in terms of one all-encompassing problematic: Unde Malum? But even more important is the inclusion of philosophical categories in the speculation on evil set forth by Augustine in his fight against the tragic vision of this gnosis. (253)

Both the Gnostics and Augustine explained causes of suffering in ways that conflated evil with suffering. Gnosticism posed the idea that evil, encompassing suffering, was an active (even divine) influence on the world. Augustine attempted to deflect guilt for suffering away from God by asserting that evil is without substance, but this led him to equate suffering with human error. Evil and suffering are not a substantial force, Augustine thought, but always a manifestation of how humanity turns away from the only substantial thing, God and his goodness (253). Human evil and suffering are as if they are one and the same; the presence of one entails that of the other.

It was from these assumptions, Ricoeur suggests, that Augustine was led to the doctrine of original sin, or the belief that the penalty for Adam’s transgression is born by all members of the human family. Augustine’s correlation between evil and suffering does not entirely resolve the dismal worldview of the
Gnostics that attributed evil to divine cause (253-54). Augustine redirects guilt toward humanity, whose errors become the ultimate reason for suffering.

The confusion of evil with suffering that we find in Augustine’s thought is an easy mistake to make. Because of the way we experience guilt (or evil action) and suffering, Ricoeur says, it is very easy to conflate the two. Punishment that comes as a consequence for evil is suffering, thus guilt leads to pain. To do evil, to be guilty, is to cause suffering (often including our own). We can also feel guilty in times of undue suffering. In doing evil, we can even feel that we are the victims of greater evil influences at work in the world, a great history of evil doing that we are helplessly enmeshed within (250). But, Ricoeur writes, we must recognize that although they are complexly intertwined, evil and suffering are not the same. Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, for example, cannot account for unjust suffering (254).

The search for one joint cause of evil and suffering prepared the way for theodicy, or the search for rational explanations for evil’s presence in a divinely created, good world. Theodicy, Ricoeur writes, is a “battle for the sake of coherence,” amidst what is irreconcilable. Its basis is problematic because it assumes that a satisfactory answer to the origins of evil can be found, and that evil encompasses suffering (249). Both human evil and suffering undercut attempts to trace their sources to satisfying answers. Kant expressed this when he wrote that ‘[t]here is no conceivable ground from which the moral evil in us could originally have come.’ Ricoeur “admire[s] this ultimate avowal on Kant’s part” because “[l]ike Augustine, and … mythical thought, Kant caught sight of the demonic
aspect of the ground of human freedom, yet he did so with the sobriety of a
thinking always careful not to transgress the limits of knowledge” (258-59).
Augustine had crossed the “limits of knowledge” when he attributed all suffering
to human guilt and cause. The Gnostics had crossed these limits by attributing all
suffering and evil to the divine. Theodicy in general goes too far by asserting it
has uncovered definitive sources of evil and suffering.

APPLYING RICOEUR’S DISCUSSION TO ENVIRONMENTAL
PERSPECTIVES
In relation to our ancestors and the evils of modern technology, and in the context
of the West’s traditional ways of approaching the problem of suffering, it is
tempting to perform something like a theodicy to explain the exploitive uses of
technology in Western culture. The religious texts and worldviews of our
ancestors may seem logical sources of problematic worldviews. But seeking
precise causes for the evils of the environmental crisis crosses the bounds of what
can be known and should be asserted, and perpetuates the West’s tradition of
conflating suffering and evil and tracing the ultimate sources of both. Thinking
about evil and suffering, Ricoeur suggests, begins with religious texts, but cannot
become a search for explanations of human evil and suffering. Religious
narratives are not given to inform us of definitive sources of evil. Instead, they
focus on practice, or how we must learn to respond to evil, which is always to
resist it (259). As Ricoeur suggests, our theoretical attempts to explain sources of
evil and suffering in the West could benefit from shifting to a focus on practical
understanding of morality. Doing this, we should deliberately allow ourselves to recognize our ignorance of why certain forms of human evil and suffering unfold in our world (258-61). Religious narratives can play a role in this, but not the one that they have often played in the West. Becoming more pragmatic and less concerned with theodicy-like propositions, we can interpret the significance of the religious narratives we have inherited anew to seek ways to diminish particular evils and suffering.

Although the environmental publications I have discussed do not attempt what we would call theodicy (partly because they are concerned with identifying causes of a particular form of human evil, which can benefit from discussion of problematic choices and cultural influences) their concern with the exploitive practices of technology is entangled within a larger problem concerning evil and suffering they do not directly address. We might summarize this question as, how do human needs and suffering deceive us into justifying exploiting natural life and others, perpetuating evil and suffering? Or in other words, how do our efforts to relieve human suffering become an immoral form of mastery? Exploitive practices in modern technology can often be considered to attempt to suppress suffering by extreme measures. We can apply this moral question to Judeo-Christian narratives.

MARION’S PHENOMENOLOGY OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

Christian narratives offer special ideas about how to respond to suffering that overthrow the mastery asserted by technological worldviews. This appears to be
what Ricoeur means when he writes that restoring the power of narratives to help us respond ethically to suffering is a “specifically Christian task” (Figuring 238). In “Evil in Person,” Jean-Luc Marion offers a phenomenology of evil and suffering. He characterizes qualities of evil actions based on a Christian understanding of Satan. The most basic assumption behind evil actions, Marion observes, is that suffering is evil. Because suffering is evil, it demands that we respond by repressing or mastering it. If suffering truly were evil, this might be true. As Ricoeur describes, religious narratives instruct that evil is “what ought not to be” (259), whatever form it takes. However, evil is deceptive. It teaches us that only by identifying a “precise cause” of pain and returning evil can we find peace and relief (1-5). Evil also deceives us into desiring to ward off feelings of guilt and to establish our own innocence through revenge. When guilty, we feel like victims, and then victimize others. Or, because unjust suffering makes us feel fearful we ourselves have caused it, we grow eager to mark ourselves as blameless by redirecting blame to someone else. Ironically, the very act of revenge often increases our guilt rather than establishes our innocence as we deliberately choose to inflict suffering on others (7).

As Marion describes, evil blinds us in our attempts to identify exact causes. The impossibility of uncovering them with accuracy is evident in the fact that most suffering offers a multitude of possible sources, despite our desires to accuse a “face” or “name.” Some forms of suffering clearly offer no possibilities of blaming at all (4). This is not to assert that human error and guilt are irrelevant to suffering and evil, but that suffering usually does not have one cause. As
Ricoeur writes, although human error is a major source of suffering, “we have no idea” how to ever separate human and non-human causes of suffering, “to such an extent does human violence impregnate suffering” (259). Error and evil affect human suffering rather than effect it in ways we can determine with accuracy.

THE LOGIC OF ACCUSATION IN AS YOU LIKE IT

In *As You Like It*, characters’ accusations suggest the impossibility of blaming precise causes of suffering and evil. Shakespeare retells the conflict between Cain and Abel, allowing brothers to come to amends rather than end in tragedy. However, they must first overcome their desires to accuse each other. The first speech in the play is one long accusation by Orlando against his brother Oliver. Oliver, as the oldest son, has inherited his father’s fortune and taken a father-like role in determining the destiny of his younger brother, whom he keeps at home without allowing him the education promised by their father. Their first argument occurs in Oliver’s orchard (I.i.41), which emphasizes not only his resemblance to Cain, who was a “tiller of the ground” (*King James Version*, Gen. 4.2), but also the unfairness of his inheritance of their father’s estate.

Primogeniture is an example of how suffering and evil evade being traced to ultimate causes. This is emphasized by the words of Jacques, who says that his melancholy will lead him to “rail against all the firstborn of Egypt” if he can’t sleep (II.v.60-61). In the book of Exodus, the firstborn of Egypt appeared as villains to the Hebrews as the inheritors of a nation that oppressed them. But in time, suffering turned tables. The Hebrews’ liberation required the lives of
Egypt's firstborn, who then became victims. In the Exodus narrative, there is no ultimate source of injustice; all suffer and affect the suffering of others. Orlando and Oliver seek to accuse each other and to victimize themselves, but the ultimate causes of their personal suffering circumvent definition. The de Boys’ father made the will that gave authority to Oliver, so Oliver is not solely to blame, but he also misuses his authority to guard his father’s estate, promising Oliver only a “part” of his inheritance (I.i.77-79). This was not their father’s intention. As Adam reminds the brothers (much as the biblical Adam might have expressed to Cain) their father would have had them “at accord” with each other (I.i.63-64). Oliver, it turns out, justifies his actions by accusing Orlando, who is well-loved, of serving as a source of injustice in his life:

… I hope I shall see an end

of him; for my soul (yet I know not why) hates

nothing more than he. Yet he’s gentle, never school’d

and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts

enchantingly beloved; and, indeed, so much in the

heart of the world, and especially of my own

people, who best know him, that I am altogether

mispris’d. But it shall not be so long, this wrastler

shall clear all … (I.i.164-72)

Oliver believes Orlando is better liked than he. Orlando’s popularity makes Oliver feel “mispris’d.” Orlando, in turn, accuses Oliver of forcing him to “mar” his life with “idleness,” making him no better than livestock (I.i.14-16, 31-34). Orlando
compares himself to the prodigal son in the New Testament parable who begs to eat “husks” with the swine, except he has spent no “prodigal portion” to justify his brother’s unkind treatment (I.i.37-39). Thus, their conflict is tied to an additional biblical narrative about brothers and accusation. Not unlike the prodigal son, Orlando forcefully demands his inheritance. He also challenges his brother’s right to manage their father’s wealth (I.i.66-74), which leads Oliver to take further revenge on him. Although his younger brother has never threatened Oliver, Oliver perceives him as having murderous intentions. Knowing Orlando wishes to wrestle with Charles, the official court wrestler, Oliver gives Charles permission to kill Orlando and deceptively warns him the fight could lead to Charles’s death if he is not careful (I.i.139-58). In the wrestling match with Charles, Oliver hopes to see “an end” to Orlando, which will supposedly “clear all” of the conflict, leaving Oliver in peace and to take his brother’s spot within their circle of friends in addition to Orlando’s inheritance.

In light of Marion’s phenomenology, Oliver adheres to the logic of evil, and his actions suggest its self-deceptive nature. Oliver’s grounds for taking revenge are obviously irrational to the extent that even he begins to recognize this. In his “soul” he “know[s] not why” he should accuse Orlando. Oliver chooses to identify Orlando as the cause of dissatisfaction in his life among a multitude of other things that may have affected him. Having identified a source of suffering, he feels compelled to suppress this cause. His dissatisfaction will supposedly be relieved once Orlando is dead. Evil promises reconciliation through revenge, when revenge (murder and suicide in its extreme forms) is the one thing that most
prevents reconciliation and peace (Marion 14-17). Ironically, while he accuses Orlando of being murderous, it is really himself whom he reveals as murderous and cunning. The same idea is found in Duke Frederick’s attempt to enhance perceptions of Celia’s virtue by banishing her cousin Rosalind (I.iii.81-83). Evil promises that through perpetuating evil, we can claim innocence and virtue. Yet, while accusation works through an “immutable” and seemingly flawless logic through which suffering and others can be mastered, it actually increases guilt and suffering (Marion 1, 5).

Oliver’s use of the logic of evil can be paralleled with Cain’s actions in Genesis, which suggest the impossibility of accusing precise causes of evil, and how attempts to do so can lead to immoral mastery. The first act of abuse and exploitation, both of another human and natural life, recorded in Judeo-Christian texts is Cain’s choice to murder his brother Abel. Cain could be considered the originator of heinous human actions according to the narrative. The ultimate cause of Cain’s murder is elusive, however. Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices. For reasons not thoroughly explained in Genesis (although we do know Cain could have made an acceptable offering if he had chosen [Gen. 4.6-7]), Cain’s was rejected, while Abel’s was held sacred by the Lord. Cain identified Abel and his accepted offering as a cause for his own suffering and worthy of revenge (Gen. 4.2-8). Marion uses Cain as an example of false accusation in which one blames those who are happy for one’s own unhappiness, and of trying to claim innocence by deferring suffering and responsibility to others (8). Cain treated Abel’s acceptable offering as a source of evil to suppress, and doing so, justified killing
his brother in the fields. Like Shakespeare’s retelling, the account of Cain and Abel suggests how evil actions originate without just reasons or precise causes, and that it works through a deceptive logic of harming others for one’s own gain. (As Marion points out, the account of Adam and Eve’s fall, the traditional origin of evil and suffering in Judeo-Christian scripture, suggests something similar about the sources of evil. Responsibility for evil is deferred from Adam to Eve and from Eve to the serpent. No one in the narrative is ultimately to blame [9]).

Oliver treats Orlando, who like Abel is better loved by others for his virtues as a means to defer his responsibilities and alleviate his frustration.

Evil deceives and betrays both Cain and Oliver, as Marion characterizes the logic of evil to work. Cain’s murder only serves as a source of greater suffering and alienation, not only from his family and the Lord, but also the land. According to the Genesis account, the Lord cursed Cain so that the earth would no longer yield up its fruits for him, and hid His face. Cain describes his punishment as being “driven from the face of the earth” in addition to being driven from the Lord (King James Version, Gen. 4.12, 16). Any possibility of making an acceptable or sacred offering in his relationships with the natural world was now fully withheld. Oliver’s evil motives deceive and exile him in a comparable way to Cain. His attempts to kill his brother force Orlando to flee into the forest. When Duke Frederick learns that Orlando is missing, he seizes Oliver’s land and exiles him into the forest. He tells him he must not return until he can tell him what happened to his brother. Strangely, Frederick’s words are paralleled with those of the Lord in the Genesis account, who chastens Cain for disowning
his responsibilities toward his brother (III.i.16-18); *King James Version*, Gen. 4.9, III.i.1-11). Despite Frederick’s hatred of his own brother, he tells Oliver that he is only more a villain for trying to disassociate himself from his brother (III.i.12-15). Frederick takes up the role of Satan when we consider the phenomenological perspective that Marion provides. Satan, he writes, promises to stand by those who heed his promise that revenge brings reward, but then “slips away” and betrays the person, leaving him to be self-consumed by evil choices (23). Heeding the logic of evil, Duke Frederick is an enemy even to those who hold his same worldview.

We can connect the logic of evil and what is taught about the origins of evil in the Genesis account with how Frederick’s worldview influences human relationships and relationships with the natural world. Frederick’s leadership relies on accusation, revenge, and mastery over others. The wrestling motif in the play can be understood as a symbol of Frederick’s worldview (Daley, “Dispraise” 312) as well as the conflicts that occur between brothers. Oliver, Frederick, and Cain all treat others and the natural world as instruments for their own gain. Frederick’s worldview, like Cain’s, is something that demoralizes relationships between humans and the land through usurpation. Oliver and Frederick fail to adhere to the rightful connections between others and the land, much as Cain failed to value the sacredness of Abel’s sacrifice. Like Cain, it is as if Frederick and others are deceived into driving themselves off the “face of the earth,” and away from what is moral and sacred through immoral mastery over others and the natural world.
ACCUSATION’S RELEVANCE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

As we learn in both in the play and in Marion’s phenomenology, while accusation promises to be beneficial and bring reconciliation, it is actually deceptive and self-destructive. It creates a cycle of perpetually greater alienation and suffering (5-7). As the narratives I have discussed suggest, accusation alienates us not only from human others, but can also alienate us from the natural world.

Although I am not attempting to identify particular environmental arguments as immoral, we can extend what Marion and the play suggest about the dangers of accusation to responses to environmental crisis. Choosing to accuse and disassociate ourselves from others, including past generations, may inadvertently uphold relationships with the environment that are exploitive. We should be careful before we join searches for human guilt lest we risk perpetuating paradigms in which suffering is blamed too heavily on others (much as Frederick’s worldview demoralizes relationships with the natural world partly through accusing and distancing himself from others). Marion suggests that the logic of accusation, another name for the logic of evil, is affirmed and perpetuated by the enframing essence of technology that Heidegger describes:

… [O]ur time—that of nihilism—offers the remarkable distinction of furnishing a perfect (though not unexpected) support to the infinite demand for accusation: the essence of technology in effect qualifies man as potentially universally guilty, for it first of all defines him as the worker of the universe, the master and possessor
of nature, and therefore the one responsible for the world. He is responsible for the world in all that he does—production as the practical disposition of the world, as if it were a capital to exploit—but also by what he does not do; for, by right, his mastery has neither limit nor condition: all that “is produced” without his having produced it, prior to or on the margins of his production … [A]ll that which man does not produce, is imposed on him by the essence of technology as something he must anticipate, and thus as something for which he is responsible. The farther man’s knowledge extends … the more his universal responsibility proves correct. In this way, the essence of technology provides a decisive confirmation of the logic of evil: for every evil, there is always a cause: man. (5-6)

The mastery of nature and of suffering attempted in uses of modern technology can be considered an expression of the logic of evil and its attempts to trace and control causes, making humanity an ultimate cause. This passage from Marion builds off of Heidegger’s discussion in “The Question Concerning Technology” concerning how indebtedness to what cannot be reduced to human cause is replaced by a reductive sense of causality in modern technology that deceives us into assuming humanity masters events (316, 332). One of the particular ways the essence of modern technology blinds us, Marion suggests, is that it conceals that suffering and evil evade full attribution to human guilt. Its tendency to treat humanity and nature as instruments is a manifestation of deeper moral struggles
concerning human evil and mastery. Marion suggests that as we accuse human evils, we inevitably cast blame back at ourselves, increasing our sense of despair and guilt, rather than obtaining the disassociation from guilt and suffering that we seek (7). The moral struggles surrounding the environmental crisis may lead us to desire to prove ourselves innocent and others guilty for its evils, but seeking to accuse specific sources to blame may only increase feelings of helplessness. As Ricoeur describes, in performing evil ourselves we often feel like victims, or pawns to greater forces at work in one great history of human evil, which lies before everyone to see (250). To accuse, however, may put us in danger of perpetuating technology’s deception that events can be precisely traced to human cause and that suffering is to be mastered by our efforts.

The self-defeating nature of accusation in the environmental crisis can be characterized by drawing on Michel Serres’s metaphor for the environmental crisis in *The Natural Contract*. Human conflicts for power today, Serres suggests, are comparable to two men fighting in quicksand without realizing that they are both sinking into it. Serres illustrates this using Goya’s *Men Fighting with Sticks*. Our disagreements and accusations reveal themselves as futile and self-destructive in light of the reality that we have literally jeopardized the continuance of our relationship with the earth (1-7). By connecting Serres’s discussion with Marion’s argument about how the self-defeating nature of accusation is manifest in modern technology, one might argue that in Serres’s metaphorical wrestling match, both the earth and human others are treated as sources of suffering to accuse and oppress whom we make our enemies. By seeking to prove our
superiority to others, including past generations, we will only perpetuate relationships in which we master the earth that endanger our moral and mortal lives. Only by resisting the urge to accuse others (human or non-human) might we escape our dangerous situation.

The wrestling motif in *As You Like It*, which we can compare to Serres’s metaphor, seems to suggest how often those with whom we wrestle with should be our friends and allies. We have closer ties to our ancestors and our religious heritage than we might acknowledge. Through accusation and revenge, Oliver makes an enemy out a brother whose character would otherwise make them good friends. Orlando is also deceived by Frederick’s worldview to some extent, which appears signaled by his desire to try his strength at court against Charles the wrestler, and Oliver’s reference to him as a “gamester” (I.i.164). Orlando’s wrestling match with Charles works as an extension of the conflicts between the two brothers; it is Orlando’s way of proving himself to his brother, and Oliver’s means of using Charles as a tool to kill Orlando. Charles would pose no threat to Orlando if Oliver resisted his urge to accuse Orlando; he even comes to the de Boys’ home to persuade Oliver not to let Orlando fight (I.i.122-36). In a similar way, in the quicksand metaphor, the earth poses no threat unless we engage in self-destructive human conflict. It is only Oliver’s accusation that Orlando is murderous that places Orlando’s life in jeopardy (I.ii.141-55). In Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, wrestling matches similarly pose mortal danger, and end in three deaths (Barton 399).
Shakespeare’s scenes focus on ways that self-destructive patterns of accusation can be overcome. Orlando’s wrestling match does not have the same tragic end as Lodge’s. To the amazement of the spectators, Orlando escapes death from “the sinowy Charles” (II.ii.14). Charles is a foe as seemingly unconquerable as the rising quicksand, or the earth-made-enemy, in Serres’s argument. Orlando, like the stick fighters, is oblivious to his weakness before such an enemy. In a way comparable to how he miraculously escapes Charles, Orlando escapes the perpetual conflict with his brother and the loss of his inheritance through refraining from accusation, as I will discuss more at the end of this chapter. We can cross-reference these events with Touchstone’s explanation of how one can escape futile duels. As Nathaniel Strout describes:

… [T]he progress toward a duel, as described by Touchstone, follows from the mutual responses of the two parties, and … Touchstone concludes that a duel can be avoided even after the seventh step has been reached through a mutually agreed on if statement: ‘All these you may avoid but the Lie Direct; and you may avoid that too, with an If.’ (290; V.iv.90-103)

The argument leading up to a duel draws on conventional retorts Jacques and Touchstone are familiar with. This pattern is comparable to cycles of revenge, such as between Oliver and Orlando. Touchstone suggests that there is always a loop hole through which to escape combat: using an “If” statement. “If” provides a way for two enemies to “[shake] hands” and “[swear] brothers” much as Orlando and Oliver eventually learn to treat each other as brothers. What does
Touchstone mean by “If?” “Your If is the only peace maker; much virtue in If” he explains (V.iv.102-3). Touchstone’s words point toward the importance of acknowledging unseen possibilities and shattering route responses through which revenge is taken. Using “If” is a way of being open to the future being different than what the present appears to forecast. It can also serve as a way of acknowledging that offense often lacks premeditated causes, which helps open the possibility of forgiveness. This reading of Serres’s argument and As You Like It can be extended to argue that seeking to accuse past generations, we may inadvertently reinforce forms of immoral mastery. If we rely on accusation, we put ourselves at risk of ignoring what is most important (in Serres argument, avoiding the mud we are rapidly sinking into) and turning those we might be able to learn from and work with, including our ancestors and religious past in addition to the earth into our enemies. Choosing to be more open to unseen possibilities and forgiveness may prove helpful not only in reconciling ourselves with past generations, but also in improving our relationships with the natural world.

Frederick is one who would never use the “virtue” of “If,” even when others are obviously innocent. Drawing on Marion’s discussion of the essence of technology quoted above, we might say there are no “limits” or “conditions” in which humanity is not “universally guilty” in his worldview. Accusation and revenge are always appropriate, even when others are innocent. When he exiles Rosalind, and she claims that she has never had evil intentions against him even in thought, Frederick tells her:

Thus do all traitors:
If their purgation did consist in words,
They are as innocent as grace itself.
Let it suffice thee that I trust thee not. (I.iii.52-55)

Duke Frederick parallels the term “grace” with innocence as well as mercy. To believe in grace, or mercy, is to believe that there are conditions in which mercy should prevail despite moral evil. To Frederick, even while words and actions may claim just innocence, associations (Rosalind’s relationship with her father) bear guilt because they could inspire traitorous acts in the future. It makes sense for “grace” to be a superlative of innocence. To forgive is to refrain from accusation, to refuse to inflict further suffering. But Frederick does not care to show grace, even when those around him appear to be genuinely innocent. The appearance of grace conceals that all are inevitably traitors. This resembles how Marion describes that we are comforted in taking revenge by the fact that even if we accuse unjustly, inevitably the person we accuse has been the cause of pain for someone else. Frederick also seems to demonstrate the assumption that even if we punish the innocent, this is just, because inevitably they will prove their guilt as they inevitably fail to resist revenge (Marion 7). We see the similar ideas in Oliver’s thinking. To him, Orlando’s moral virtue conceals the worst intentions. Whatever “grace” Orlando has, his brother tries to take away (I.i.17-20). Grace, which includes human capacities to endure suffering and forgive despite evil, is only a manipulative façade, rather than a living virtue within the Frederick’s worldview or the logic of evil. Because of the inevitability that they will affect
suffering, it is as if humans bear punishable guilt and should be treated as one’s enemies *a priori*.

UNMASKING THE DECEPTIVE NATURE OF ACCUSATION IN AS YOU LIKE IT

Rather than seeking precise causes of moral evil in past generations, we should recognize our inability to separate ourselves and our experiences from our ancestors and the sacrifices they made on behalf of their religious traditions. Inevitably, we have been affected by immoral choices past generations have made. But we cannot trace contemporary evils to precise events in the past. We should recognize that previous generations bore many of the burdens that are ours today and that they too attempted to answer perplexing moral questions. Several scenes in *As You Like It* when Jacques and others falls into traps of blaming others can help elucidate the self-defeating nature of accusing others’ attempts to make moral decisions in relationships with nature and to seek guidance through interpretation.

First, our relationships with our ancestors’ interpretive and moral choices can be compared to a scene when Jacques mocks one of Duke Senior’s courtiers for killing a deer. He is ill-at-ease with the deer hunting of Duke Senior and his men, which he sees as shameful. When he sees a deer shot with an arrow by the Duke’s men, he is quick to ask “Which is he that kill’d the deer?” (IV.ii.1) and goes on to say:

Let’s present him to the Duke like a Roman
conqueror, and it would do well to set the deer’s horns
upon his head, for a branch of victory. Have you
no song, forester, for this purpose? (IV.ii.3-6)

Jacques intends the horns to make the hunter look like a fool. He mocks the idea
that hunting is a noble sport that demonstrates skill and strength (like a Roman at
war). Jacques seems to accuse the hunter because of the shared guilt, foolishness,
and weakness he feels himself (much as he wishes to mock others’ foolishness by
exposing his own by wearing a motley coat). He doesn’t seem to like the fact that
he relies on the Duke’s venison. The wearing of horns was associated with
cuckoldry (horns were a symbol of a man who is betrayed by an adulterous wife,
and ignorant of it), as is also referenced in Rosalind’s discussion in the previous
scene concerning the risks Orlando will take in becoming a married man (IV.i.59-
65). To Jacques, the hunter kills ignorantly and foolishly. One of the courtiers in
the hunting party does have a song to praise the hunter, but it suggests something
very different about the hunter’s actions than Jacques:

What shall he have that kill’d the deer?
His leather skin and horns to wear.
Then sing him home:

The rest shall bear this burden.

Take thou no scorn to wear the horn,
It was a crest ere thou wast born;
Thy father’s father wore it;
And thy father bore it.
The horn, the horn, the lusty horn

Is not a thing to laugh to scorn. (IV.ii.10-18)

In the forester’s song, the significance of being betrayed like a cuckold is not necessarily dropped, but the symbol of wearing horns is considered with greater seriousness. The horns in the song appear to refer to more than appearing foolish and weak. They are also tied to the harsh realities of making undesirable sacrifices (like killing animals) in order to live as we depend on natural life. Making these sacrifices involves wearing the skin and the horns, receiving what is needed for life (the skin, comparable to clothing) while making errors and facing adversities that make us appear as weak and foolish (the horns). These are the reward and the retribution for depending on natural life, what the hunter “shall have.” Errors can lead us to be mocked by others (like Jacques, who scorns those who hunt so that he may eat), even while we remain ignorant like the cuckolded man.

We can compare “wearing the horn” to the adverse relationships with nature that Adam and Eve’s family entered into and the struggle to create moral relationships with nature despite such stumbling blocks. “It was a crest err thou wast born,” seems to indicate not that it was caused by one’s fathers, but that the burden of the horn is as if it has always been; it is without definite origin. It is also comparable to Adam’s curse which brought the necessity of laboring and using (and killing) natural life. Wearing the “leather skin” resonates with the imagery surrounding the coats of skins that the Lord made Adam and Eve when they entered the wilderness, at which point the first animal appears to have been killed in the Genesis account (Gen. 3.21). The horn, the song suggests, is both
something not to “laugh to scorn” and that we should not be ashamed to take up ourselves. It is necessary and as such we cannot blame past generations for having taken up this same “crest” themselves. The horn is a symbol of humility that comes as we depend on and taking from the natural world, rather than pride as a crest would normally be. “The rest shall bear this burden” suggests the inappropriateness of accusing those who have come before us for the mistakes they made, and how it is necessary to bear up the errors of those who come before us. The horn does not necessarily encompass exploiting nature (the way Jacques sees deer hunts), but it does involve the moral risks that are inevitably taken as we attempt to learn what is right and immoral in relationships with nature.

This interpretation of the forester’s song can be connected with the argument I made about the conditional qualities of interpretation in chapter three. “Wearing the horn” is comparable to the necessity of interpreting in “errancy,” as if we are wandering in search of truth, that Martin Heidegger describes. Interpretation is an experience comparable to the exiled states of Adam and Eve and Duke Senior’s hunting men. Never obtaining perfect interpretations or moral understanding, we take risks, including the risk of being rejected by others for our actions later on. Like Adam and Eve, each generation faces the struggle to know good from evil (Gen. 3:5-6). We must attempt to discern what kinds of actions and interpretations uphold immoral forms of mastery, and to what extent sacrifices in nature are required to respond morally to human needs and the needs of other living things. The forester’s song suggests that to scorn our fathers for the sacrifices they made is to deny the reality that we too walk as errants. This can be
applied not only to our moral relationships with the natural world, but also our interpretations of scripture. We sometimes fail to acknowledge that we too “wear the horn” as we interpret texts and extend their implications to our relationships with the natural world.

Similar themes about the risks we take in interpreting are found in the ideas of “making” and “marring” in the play. Working and interpreting entail the danger of “marring” or ruining what characters attempt to create. Marring, though often unintentionally done, is met with accusation. Characters sometimes assume that making and marring cannot happen at once, much as Oliver implies that since Orlando isn’t formally taught to make anything through a trade, he must be marring something (I.i.29-34). When Orlando takes up poetry, this brings censure from Jacques, who suggests that he should “mar no more trees with writing love songs in their barks” (III.ii.259-60). In response, Orlando asks him to cease marring his poems by “reading them ill-favoredly” (III.ii.261-262). Neither Jacques nor Orlando is completely in the right. Orlando is both making and marring in that he is attempting to make something beautiful, but doing it poorly. Jacques disregards (or mars) the sincerity of Orlando’s love for Rosalind but also provides a useful critique.

Another instance of this theme is suggested when Touchstone and Audrey meet with Sir Oliver Martext, who is to marry them. Jacques criticizes Touchstone for wanting an ordinary parish priest to marry them, claiming that Martext will not “join” them properly or be able to “tell them what marriage is” (III.iii.83-89). The vicar’s name is significant; Martext, Jacques seems to suggest,
will mar marriage vows the way Orlando mars trees or hunters mar deer. He will interpret marriage, which because of Martext’s name appears compared to a “text,” poorly. Nevertheless, Audrey observes that, despite Jacques’s concerns, Martext would have been good enough for her satisfaction (V.i.3-4). To make a marriage is more than to simply mar parts of the ceremony. In creating and interpreting, the inevitability of erring must be accepted as part of the process. We mar in part because we never act or interpret perfectly. This is very similar to the idea surrounding “wearing the horn,” in which ignorance and betrayal are a part of making judgments about which sacrifices are necessary. When Touchstone criticizes Corin and shepherds generally for marring the customs of the court, Corin points out it is the very act of working with the sheep that prevents them from using court gestures like hand kissing (III.ii.45-54). It is easy for those who do not labor or interpret to criticize the efforts from those who do when they do not attempt the work themselves. What seems like “marring” is often only done in an effort to carry out what is most appropriate.

In another scene Jacques casts blame for others’ errors by treating human error as one large and impersonal history. His perspective resembles what Ricoeur explains about how it is easy for us to see ourselves as part one large history of evil which we have become the victims of:

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 … (II.vii.139-42)

Jacques goes on to describe negative aspects of each stage or “act” of life, from infancy to death. Men play like actors, proving their foolishness through every step of life (II.vii.141-66). Each part is full of self-centeredness or vanity, such as the “infant / Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms” or the “justice ... full of wise saws.” Jacques makes this metaphor in response to the Duke’s observation, on meeting Orlando who is desperate to find food for Adam, that they are not the only unhappy or trouble individuals because “This wide and universal theater / Presents more woeful pageants than the scene / Wherein we play” (II.vii.137-39). The two metaphors are similar, but each character’s beliefs of the moral implications of evil and suffering are distinct. To the Duke, each person met on the “stage” of life meets personal suffering that inspires empathy. Jacques describes individuals in generic terms as predictable. They are merely senseless tools for the stage’s plot. His solution is to go about humbling and revealing the foolishness of everyone (II.vii.47-61). By revealing the universal foolishness and vanity of humanity, Jacques treats others as victims of one great pattern of human error. Duke Senior understands Jacques’s approach to be a way a “chiding” sin, in itself a “foul sin” that will lead Jacques to only spread the evils he wishes to cure. Jacques himself has set a faulty example and cannot expect good results from chastising others for errors he has made himself (II.vii.64-69). We can compare the implications of Marion’s argument that the logic of accusation affirms the deceptions of contemporary technology to this scene. By accusing others, we may
unintentionally spread complacent worldviews we wish to challenge through environmental writing.

The encounter with Orlando and Adam challenges Jacques’s dismal perspective of humanity and human suffering as vain. Orlando resembles both the youthful “lover” writing “woeful ballad[s]” about things as insignificant as his “mistress’ eyebrow,” as well as the soldier who is [quick in quarrel] Jacques describes (II.vii.147-53). Adam is in Jacques’s “sixt stage,” characterized by a laughable and child-like physical deportment (II.vii.157-62), which characterizes him accurately to some degree. Yet Adam and Orlando are full of gratitude for the Duke’s assistance and humility rather than self-centeredness or reckless foolishness (II.vii.168-70). Although Orlando at first foolishly threatens the party, even this is done out of unselfish concern for Adam, who “limped” into the woods to follow Orlando in his exile out of “pure love” (II.vii.129-31). The same characteristics Jacques mocks (the feebleness and “limp” of old age, and Orlando’s youthful passion and quickness to argue) are ironically characteristics that ennoble Adam and Orlando. These characters act, like the Duke, out of thoughtful concern for others rather than as senseless pawns. Duke Senior’s actions help revive Adam, and Orlando has the wisdom to withdraw his foolish threat, “blush,” and “hide [his] sword” (II.vii.169-173, II.vii.106-19). Reducing others to faceless victims of a “stage” driven by human folly proves false. As the Duke seems to suggest to Jacques when he warns him against “chiding sin,” such approaches may lead to feelings of helplessness rather than empowerment to change ourselves and assist others.
The message, in each case, that responds to efforts to accuse and/or punish others in the play is that while accusation is often immoral, accepting and responding with empathy toward others’ suffering and failings is moral. We can connect this idea to what Marion suggests in his phenomenology of evil. From a Christian perspective, the only alternative to the logic of evil is Christ’s way of responding to human error and suffering (8). Christ’s logic is to willingly bear up the burdens and errors of others to alleviate suffering and diminish evil. It instructs us to refrain from accusation and revenge. Only Christ, Marion writes, is capable of facing suffering and evil like a lamb to the slaughter, silent in His refusal to blame others (8). Only He resists the urge to master suffering, and instead allows human suffering and error to unfold itself to Him for all it is. The question of mastery and how to respond to suffering that is raised in the Genesis account of the first human family (and in the play in the conflicts between brothers), finds answers in Christ’s suffering. Christ’s way is to labor and suffer for the benefit and relief of others rather than cast the burden of one’s own suffering on others.

THE POSSIBLE AFFECTS OF ACCUSATION ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

When we buy into the logic of accusation, it can blind us to the value of this message in Christian scripture. Within the logic of evil, Marion argues, the suffering that Christ endured in His act of atonement can essentially be treated as a mere means, or even as a way of casting guilt for suffering on the divine. It
appears as nothing more than a confirmation of divine guilt for human evil and suffering (or that God is the cause of all evil), or an instrument to proclaim human innocence (10-11). Although such a misunderstanding of evil may not be found in direct responses to Christian narratives, when we adhere to evil’s logic and attempt to defer moral guilt, we can become desensitized to the significance of Christ’s way of responding to human evil and suffering. Through accusation, the narratives’ religious meanings can be concealed.

Taking accusation as a response to the environmental crisis too far may place us in danger of desensitizing ourselves to what is good in religious texts and traditions. Rather than empowering our capacities to respond to moral wrongs, accusation can make us more inert. Jacques’s accusations against humanity’s evils lead him to perceive things that are good, even in himself and his own culture, as bad. After a life of travels, Jacques sorrows over world evil’s, which lead his life to be saturated with a “melancholy of [his] own” (IV.i.15-16). In response, Rosalind jokingly counsels Jacques to “chide God” for making him the disposition that he is. This sarcastic advice also includes being “out of love with [his] nativity” and “[disabling] all the benefits of [his] own country” (IV.i.34-37). Rosalind exposes Jacques’s accusations as deceptions that take even what is good to be evil. We can compare “chid[ing] God” and failing to appreciate the beauties of one’s own country to the possibility of unintentionally failing to acknowledge what is good in religious texts and traditions by going overboard in efforts to uncover blameworthy cultural and historical origins. In response to Jacques’s belief that “’tis good to be sad and say nothing,” Rosalind replies, “Why then ‘tis
good to be a post.” Even though Jacques believes his constant disapproval of the world is productive, Rosalind uncovers its futility and passivity. To favor either “laughing” or “melancholy” (which we can respectively compare to carelessness and obsession with censuring others) in “extremity” is “abominable” (IV.i.4-9). Blaming faults in Western culture and traditions may be no better than reckless indifference to the ecological crisis when taken to certain measures. As we distance ourselves from the West’s religious tradition and seek sources of moral wrongs, we need to be careful of entering other dangerous extremities.

An alternative response to Jacques’s ways of “chiding” is demonstrated by Orlando. Jacques invites Orlando “to rail against our mistress the world, and all our misery” with him, but he merely replies, “I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults” (III.ii.276-79). Like Jacques, Orlando has encountered the evils of Frederick’s court, but unlike him, he withholds accusation. He even acknowledges his ignorance of the whole of his own faults, only claiming to know most of them. In time, as he reconciles with his brother, Orlando proves that he has become willing to face evil and suffering without returning revenge to others.

BREAKING CYCLES OF ACCUSATION AND EXPLOITATION

The cycle of revenge between Orlando and Oliver introduced in the first scenes of the play begins to be resolved when Orlando chooses to forgive Oliver. After Oliver is exiled by Frederick, he is attacked by a snake and a lion, and Orlando finds him unconscious in the forest. Orlando determines to turn away from his
brother twice, but ultimately risks his life to save his brother’s. “Kindness, nobler than revenge” triumphs in Orlando (IV.iii.128). He chooses to be free of his desire to take revenge and becomes willing to suffer on Oliver’s behalf despite his brother’s past wrongs. Orlando’s choice to end the patterns of revenge is paired with a transformation in his relationships with the forest. He no longer sees the woods as savage and in need of strenuous cultivation. Disguised as Ganymede, Rosalind helps Orlando learn to see the beauty of the forest and concealed sources of wisdom and order in it. Ganymede, Orlando asserts in Act V, is truly “forest born,” something he doubted before (III.ii.341-50, V.iv.28-30). Much as Orlando learns to have greater faith in Rosalind’s “wisdom” despite the adversities in marriage (IV.i.146-59), he learns to have faith in the magic Ganymede has learned “obscured in the circle of [the] forest” (V.iv.34). Orlando’s sense that he “can live no longer by thinking” (V.ii.50) compels him to have faith in Ganymede’s promise to bring Rosalind as his bride in the woods. The superficial hopes he once imposed on the trees are no longer enough. Orlando needs to form a real relationship with Rosalind in the same way he has developed a more authentic relationship with the forest by meeting some of its greatest adversities, such as a lioness, face to face. As Ganymede, Rosalind performs a magic trick through which she and Orlando, and the squabbling couple Phebe and Silvius are brought together that Orlando has faith he can perform (V.iv.3-4). For Orlando, the forest is no longer a lonely “desert,” but a place where human relationships can be set in order through unforeseen sources of hope.
Forgiveness transforms Oliver in addition to Orlando. As Orlando battles with the lion, Oliver wakes from a “miserable slumber” which seems to refer to the jaded and jealous perspective he once had (IV.iii.132). He tells Rosalind and Celia later that it was and was not he that had sought Orlando’s life; in other words, he has become a new person, the conversion to which is so “sweet” that Oliver does not even feel shame to confess his former errors because they no longer matter (IV.iii.135-38).

Duke Senior appears to play an important role in helping the brothers overcome their patterns of accusation. Duke Senior’s response to human suffering is the antithesis of Duke Frederick’s logic of accusation. Rather than continually seeking revenge, he seeks the presence of grace amidst adversity. He believes in human capacities to endure suffering while not seeking to blame and avenge its cause, and forgiving even after evil is performed. Suffering and evil do not eclipse the presence of grace for him. His perspective is comparable to Augustine’s and Origen’s beliefs that by cross-referencing sacred meanings in scripture with the natural world, we can perceive divine grace even in things that seem evil. After Orlando is wounded, Orlando leads Oliver to the Duke who invites them to his table. The Duke gives Oliver “fresh array” like the father who dresses his returned prodigal son in robes. He also “[commits] Oliver “unto [his brother’s] love” (IV.iii.143), as the same father in the parable entreats the older jealous brother to forgive the younger (Luke 15.22-32). Both brothers are like the elder and younger brothers in the New Testament parable; they have each affected others’ suffering,
suffered, and feared the loss their inheritance, which we might compare to the loss of good relationships with the natural world.

Forgiveness leads to good relationships with the land. Just after Touchstone’s speech on the power of “If” to prevent duels even when they seem inevitable, Hymen, the God of marriage who inexplicably comes to attend the weddings, says:

Then is there mirth in heaven,
When earthly things made even
Atone together. (V.iv.108-10)

The “virtue” of “If” Touchstone describes is comparable to the miraculous way that the brothers’ conflict is overcome. In the context of this concluding scene, to “make even” and to “atone” refer to reunion (such as Rosalind’s reunion with Orlando at this moment, as well as the brothers reunion), reconciliation (including between the brothers, who marry Rosalind and Celia in the same ceremony in this scene) and sacrificing in order to make past wrongs right. Forgiveness allows not only human relationships but also relationships with the forest and other lands to become moral. It allows the characters to “atone” for formally exploitive and selfish relationships with the natural world, which seems encompassed in “earthly things.” Much in the same way that Orlando no longer sees the forest and its adversities as threatening after forgiving his brother, their reconciliation eliminates all conflict over their father’s inheritance. The disagreement, which nearly led to the deaths of both, had turned their inherited land and the forest into enemies comparable to the suicidal quicksand in Serres’s metaphor. When their
relationship is rid of patterns of revenge to suppress suffering, relationships with
nature undergo a similar transformation. Oliver decides to take up a shepherd’s
life in the forest and to give the whole of their father’s inheritance to Orlando
(V.ii.9-12). We find the same pattern in Frederick’s moral transformation; his
recognition of the wrongs he had committed against his brother leads him
immediately to give up his tyrannical leadership and “restore all [the] lands” of
those he exiled at once (V.iv.163-65).

The reconciliations that occur in the play suggest the importance of
relinquishing desires to accuse and repress sources of suffering in order to build
moral relationships. This does not entail that when we refrain from accusing
others, this is a way to justify moral evil in ourselves. Refusing to accuse is a way
to avoid inflicting suffering and exercising immoral mastery. Instead of
diminishing our capacities to respond fully to suffering, such restraint increases
them. Refraining from blaming others keeps us from distractions that prevent us
from building the honest relationships with the natural world, with past
generations, and with future generations.

Marion suggests that only learning to forgive and to cease to accuse others
allows us to break out of the cycles of revenge. Recognizing our inability to trace
sources of suffering and evil may help us to cease reducing suffering to something
within our control and which we must suppress in our material culture. As
Heidegger suggests about the essence of technology, only recognizing ways
technology invites us to enframe others and nature as instruments might allow us
to engage our world honestly (311, 325, 337-38). In a similar way, perhaps by
resisting the urge to treat religious traditions and texts as sources of exploitive practices we can engage our past and our religious heritage with clarity and hope to overcome immoral practices. Being slow to lay blame on others can help us refrain from tendencies to use others as means to establish one’s own innocence from our society’s immoral practices. Forgiving our predecessors of their mistakes might serve as one way to begin to “atone” for moral errors in our relationships with the earth.

LEARNING FROM THE WEST’S DESACRALIZATION OF NATURE AND SCRIPTURE

Rather than distancing ourselves from traditional religious narratives, we can reengage them to learn about moral responses to evil. At the same time, we can also learn from criticisms that claim Christian interpretation and scripture have led to desacralization and immoral relationships with nature. Such perspectives can be received as invitations to interpret more thoughtfully, especially in relation to our efforts to build moral relationships with the natural world. The very recognition of ways both scripture and nature have become desacralized in contemporary culture may help empower us to revitalize capacities to engage the sacred. One price of mastery over nature to stave off human needs, Ricoeur suggests, is its desacralization. Yet, with this loss comes the possibility that the religious and the sacred might be invested with greater significance than it has ever had previously. This idea resonates with Heidegger’s idea that “where the danger lies, lies the saving power also,” or that paradoxically, the blindness
caused by the essence of technology, given the condition that we begin to recognize our blindness and moral impoverishment, is the very thing that opens the possibility that we can reinstate more truthful relationships with our world than ever before, especially through art (333-41). As Ricoeur explains, in addition to desacralization:

This also is a gift of our ‘modernity,’ for we moderns are the heirs of philology, of exegesis, of the phenomenology of religion, of the psychoanalysis of language. The same epoch holds in reserve both the possibility of emptying language by radically formalizing it and the possibility of filling it anew by reminding itself of the fullest meanings … the ones which are most bound by the presence of the sacred to man. (*Symbolism* 349)

Environmental criticisms of Christian scripture and interpretive traditions can point us toward better ways of interpreting, which involves looking closely at what the narratives teach us about the moral truth of living in the world. By reconnecting with scripture personally, Ricoeur suggests, we can learn to “hear” the sacred in the phenomenological world again (*Symbolism* 351).

The task applies particularly to our need for an understanding of human guilt in the environmental crisis and how we should respond to it. Religious narratives provide symbols of guilt, such as “deviation, wandering, captivity … chaos, blinding, mixture, [and the] fall” which “speak of the situation of the being of man in the being of the world. The task, then, is starting from the symbols, to elaborate [on] the being of man” (*Symbolism* 356). This resembles Heidegger’s
suggestion that engaging poetry might overthrow the influence of enframing worldviews because art speaks truths about what it means to “[dwell] on this earth” (Heidegger, “Technology” 340). In a similar way, religious narratives can allow us to learn what it means to dwell on the earth by helping us perceive sacredness and moral constraints in the face of evil and suffering. Interpreting religious narratives in our relationships with the natural world might shatter modern technology’s blinding essence.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE “BOOK OF NATURE” ON ENVIRONMENTAL WRITING

While the book of nature is encompassed in Judeo-Christian traditions environmental writers have sometimes dismissed or cast in a negative light, surprisingly, its hermeneutic extends valuable lessons that may help us understand and respond to the environmental crisis. Implications of the “book of nature” analogy I have discussed in light of its Christian conceptualizations in late antiquity, Paul Ricoeur’s essays on religious interpretation, and Shakespeare’s As You Like It, invite us to consider the possible importance of scripture in moral relationships with nature with greater depth in environmental writing. Lessons from the “book of nature” I have suggested include the interdependence of “manifestation” and “proclamation,” the necessity of accepting adversities and contingencies in both nature and scripture to perceive sacred meanings, and how Judeo-Christian scripture may help us perceive ethical responses to suffering amidst adversities in relationships with the natural world. These extensions of the
“book of nature” do not begin to exhaust ways we may explore the hermeneutic to build needed bridges between religious and environmental perspectives. The concept is a useful tool through which we might nuance environmental arguments concerning religious readings which cross-reference meanings in scripture and other religious texts with the phenomenological world. Because of its frequent appearance in the West’s religious and non-religious history and literary works, topics surrounding the “book of nature” may prove especially helpful in bridging gaps between ecocritical writing and ecotheology. It also opens ways to examine tensions between religious exegesis and scientific “readings” of nature. More specifically, the historical, religious and literary contexts I had discussed uncover only a few ways the “book of nature” may be used to defend the possible vitality of religious belief and interpretation in the future of environmental writing and as we seek solutions for the ecological crisis.
Works Cited


Wilson, “‘Like the Old Robin Hood:’ As You Like It and the Enclosure Riots.”