

Eco-Consciousness in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

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Abstract: *Eco-criticism essentially intends to recuperate the magnificence of nature. An eco-critic reads literature and environment side by side with his one eye set upon the work of art and the other scanning the ecological processes around him with his one hand holding the book and the other holding a branch of a tree. This is about the consciousness of ecology in Shakespeare's "As You Like It" In short, eco-criticism is an effort on the part of literary critics to add their contribution to the collective efforts of the participants in other disciplines such as: theology, politics, anthropology and psychology, to reserve nature around them that had been kind and benevolent throughout the ages. Here the paper tries to attempt the eco-consciousness in Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy *As You Like It*.*

I. Introduction

The opening scene of *As You Like It* displays Orlando and Adam discussing in the orchard adjoined to Oliver's house. Rosalind and Celia are introduced to the audience while they were wandering in the lawn. We meet the other important characters we meet in the heart of untainted nature.

In Act II Scene (iii) the jealous Duke Frederick, endangered by the good reputation of Rosalind among people, exiles her from the court. Celia, out of her love and compassion for her sister, deliberately takes the exile upon herself, decisive to leave the court in disguise.

On the other hand Orlando, to get rid of the conspiracy of his brother to kill him, escapes into the forest, with Adam willfully accompanying him. Duke Senior, the father of Rosalind, along with his courtiers has already taken refuge into the forest after his exile from the court. Now we have almost all the major characters assembled into the Forest of Arden.

An appreciation of the natural beauty of the forest is presented through the song of Amiens in Act II Scene (v). The song is truly a call to a true lover of nature to lie down under the greenwood tree and enjoy the sweet, joyful song of the birds. Here the only enemy is the adversities of the rough, wintry season. According to the song, this is an ideal place for a person without any worldly ambition, to live in the open air, greeting the wind and rough weather.

Duke Senior too accepts the valuable effects of the forest—Find tongues in trees, books in the murmuring brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything (Act II Scene i L. 16-17). In the last scene, the Pages sing a song in appreciation of spring, portraying a beautiful picture of this lovely season. As this is the season of the lovers, they too sing in a ecstatic state of mind along with the sweet, tinkling song of the birds.

There are plenty of signs of the contrast between the forest and the court. For example, we may refer to the introductory speech of Duke Senior in Act II scene (i) addressing his companions in exile. Here through a rhetorical interrogation he asserts that their present state of exile in the heart of nature is more sweet than their previous life in the court.

These woods are less dangerous than the artificially glittering court with its jealousies and rivalries. The only adversity they have to face here is the penalty of Adam's, the icy sting of the winter wind.

Orlando in Act I is a disgruntled young man, melancholic, bound to bear with the tyranny of his brother, and doesn't find any alteration between life and death. But once he enters into the Forest of Arden, a space free from the norms of hierarchy, he asserts himself as a loyal courtier and a fervent lover.

He feels free to express his passion through verses, however bad they are, engraved on the barks of the trees. The Forest of Arden presents before us a transformed Orlando elated, sparkling with vigor and energy, just like his poems, an expression of inner joy.

The change of Oliver and Duke Frederick too are very clear. Being a victim of the socio-political edifice of the court, they too had to subdue their better selves, the feelings of kinship and other virtues. But when they enter Arden, it allows those qualities within them to emerge.

The most prominent transformation that the Forest of Arden makes is that of Rosalind. As soon as she dons men's apparel, her latent courage and potential comes out. Once she is free from the limits of the court, she becomes the director of the actions and emotions of almost all the characters in the play.

This becomes most noticeable in the climax when she regulates and directs, and even prompts the other characters their dialogues. And this empowerment of hers is actually a gift of the Forest of Arden.

As *You Like It* describes Forest of Arden as an enthralled forest. Here Eco criticism offers a more realistic reading. According to it, nature itself has a generous inspiration upon all the creatures. Once you come under its comforting effect, you will find peace and rest within yourself. Such was the case of Oliver and Duke Frederick too.

After the tiresome ways of life in the court, when they entered into the peaceful and serene atmosphere of the forest, they realized the vanity of wealth, power and lust leading nowhere but to damnation. So, they overthrew all their evil enterprises in order to live a new life in the lap of nature.

Jaques introduces an eco-centric point of view into the text. The previous occasion shows Jaques feeling compassion for the wounded deer. Later in another occasion we see him reproaching Orlando for vandalizing the barks of the trees by writing love-poems on them. He feels the pain of the trees while carving the letters on them.

He is a true lover of nature in its original essence. That's why when everything is happily settled down at the end of the play, and all other characters are returning to the court, he is the only one who refuses to leave the forest.

This particular play by Shakespeare is founded on Thomas Lodge's *Rosalinde* clearly, some differences from the source we can perceive in the play. One such distinction is the inclusion of the character of Jaques. He needed a messenger to express his own ecocentric views. So through the Character of Jaques he expresses his eco centric observations.

Though Shakespeare was writing a pastoral comedy, his eco-conscious mind could not admit some of the activities of the characters resulting in disturbing the ecological balance of the forest.

Works Cited

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