

The Green Shakespeare: An Ecocritical Reading*

Yeşil Shakespeare: Ekoeleştirel Bir Okuma

Himmet UMUNÇ**

Abstract

The physical environment has always been a major concern of inquiry and research for scientists. Yet, throughout history, it has also been of interest to men of letters. Science has made this inquiry through the pragmatics of scientific methodology involving experimentation, observation, measurement and other procedures so that we may learn about the environment. As for literature, it has been concerned with the environment through a mimetic and exegetical representation. So, the environment has become a common ground where both literature and science converge in order to instruct and enlighten us so that we may live in a sustainable harmony with the natural world. In this respect, by arousing our interest, literature contributes indirectly to the enhancement of our environmental sensitivity. Besides its mimetic practice, literature is also involved in various processes of exegesis, which constitute the basis of the current ecocritical theory and gesture to a new field of study. This new field has aptly been called “the environmental humanities.” Historically, although the ecocritical theory and its pragmatics have been a recent concern of literary scholarship, the mimetic interest in the natural world has always been a recurrent fact ever since the beginnings of literary writings. Indeed, through its varied representations of nature, literature has enabled us to reshape and broaden our sense of a sustainable environment. Moreover, by problematizing and discussing environmental issues, it has urged us to revisit our cultural values and assumptions about nature and its conservation. Therefore, literary studies with relation to environmental representation in texts can be instructive and upgrade our awareness of the natural world. In this respect, one may wonder whether, for instance, Shakespeare’s depiction of the natural world, and his use of *ecological* settings and landscapes in some of his plays can be read in terms of an environmental awareness. Hence, this article is an attempt to demonstrate how some of Shakespeare’s plays are embedded with *ecological* implications and subtexts. In this regard, besides brief references to his other plays, especially *As You Like It*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest* will be the main focus of the article.

Keywords: Shakespeare, ecocriticism, Shakespeare and environment, Shakespeare and ecology, environmental studies

Öz

Doğal çevre, bilimciler için daima önemli bir araştırma ve sorgulama konusu olmuştur. Ancak, tarih boyunca, edebiyatçıların da ilgisini çekmiştir. Bilim, çevre hakkında bilgi edinebilmemiz için, deney, gözlem, ölçme ve diğer yöntemleri içeren bilimsel metodoloji uygulamalarını kullanarak araştırma ve sorgulamayı yapmıştır. Edebiyat ise, betimleme ve yorumlama yöntemiyle, çevreyi kendisine konu edinmiştir. Bu bakımdan, çevre, bilimle edebiyatın birleştiği ortak alan olmuştur çünkü her ikisi de doğa ile sürdürülebilir bir uyum içinde yaşayabilmemiz için, bizi bilgilendirir ve aydınlatır. Bu bağlamda, edebiyat, bizde ilgi uyandırarak, çevreye karşı

* This is a revised and expanded version of the paper with the title “Tongues in Trees: Shakespeare and the Environment,” originally presented at the “International Conference on Environment: Survival and Sustainability,” Near Eastern University, Nicosia, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, 19-24 February 2007

** Prof.Dr., Department of American Culture and Literature, Faculty of Science and Letters, Başkent University, umunch@baskent.edu.tr

duyarlılığımızın güçlenmesine dolaylı katkıda bulunur. Edebiyat, betimlemelerin yanı sıra, çeşitli yorumlama süreçlerini de içerir ve bu süreçler, günümüzde önem kazanan ekoeleştirel kuramın temelini oluşturur ve “çevresel insan bilimleri” adı verilen yeni bir araştırma alanının varlığını gösterir. Tarihsel çerçevede, ekoeleştirel kuramı ve uygulaması, edebiyat araştırmalarında yeni bir konudur, ancak doğaya yönelik yansıtma ve betimleme ilgisi, edebiyatın başlangıcından beri süregelen bir gerçektir. Esasen, edebiyat, doğaya ilişkin çeşitli betimlemeler sunarak, sürdürülebilir bir çevre anlayışımızın yeniden biçimlenmesini ve güçlenmesini sağlar. Edebiyat, ayrıca, çevre sorunlarını ortaya koyarak ve tartışarak, bizi, doğaya ve doğanın korunmasına ilişkin kültür değerlerimizi ve algılarımızı yeniden gözden geçirmemize yöneltir. O nedenle, metinlerdeki çevre anlatımlarına ve betimlemelerine yönelik edebiyat araştırmaları hem eğitici olabilir, hem doğaya ilişkin farkındalığımızı artırabilir. Bu bakımdan, örneğin, Shakespeare’in doğaya ilişkin anlatımlarının ve bazı oyunlarında *ekolojik* sahneler ve doğal ortamlar kullanımının, çevresel farkındalık çerçevesinde anlaşılıp anlaşılamayacağı merak edilebilir. İşte bu makale, onun bazı oyunlarının *ekolojik* anlamlar ve alt metinler içerdiğini ortaya koymak için bir girişimdir. Bu bağlamda, makalede, diğer oyunlarına yapılan kısa atıfların yanı sıra, esas itibarıyla *As You Like It* [Beğendiğiniz Gibi], *The Winter’s Tale* [Kış Masalı] ve *The Tempest* [Fırtına] oyunları üzerinde durulacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Shakespeare, ekoeleştirel, Shakespeare ve çevre, Shakespeare ve ekoloji, çevre araştırmaları

Our relationship with the natural world, which constitutes our environmental state of being, has always been a major concern of inquiry and research for scientists. Science has carried out this inquiry through the pragmatics of scientific methodology involving experimentation, observation, measurement, classification and other procedures in order ultimately to make instructive statements whereby our environmental awareness is strengthened and made proactive. Yet, throughout history, the natural world has also been of interest to men of letters. Literature, like other forms of art, has been concerned with nature through a mimetic and exegetical praxis such as exemplified through various forms of nature writing and scholarly studies of such writing. Thus, it has attempted to arouse our interest in the natural world and, hence, enhance our environmental sensitivity. So, the natural world has become a common ground where both literature and science converge in order to instruct and enlighten us so that we may live in a sustainable harmony with nature. Historically, the term “ecocriticism” was first introduced by William Rueckert¹ back in 1978 when he published his seminal article “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.”² However, the actual formulation of the ecocritical theory was proposed in the early 1990s in the United States as a framework of reference for “the study of literature and environment.”³ So, although the ecocritical theory and its pragmatics have been a recent concern of literary scholarship, the mimetic praxis as regards the natural world has always been a recurrent concern ever since the beginnings of literary production in the history of man. Indeed, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in the Sumerian times to Homer in classical antiquity and to the Bible among the earliest texts, one can discern some vestiges of environmental sensitivity, which is revealed, to some extent, through fragmentary depictions and descriptions of the environment. For instance, the story of the wild man Enkidu in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, who lives in a sustainable harmony with nature and its fauna,⁴ can be understood in environmental terms. As narrated in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Enkidu, who was created by the Sumerian goddess of creation Aruru,⁵

1 See Mazel, 2001, p. 1; also Branch and Slovic, 2003, p. xiv.

2 For a full text of the article, see *Iowa Review*, 9 (1978), pp.71-86. The article has been reprinted in Fromm and Glotfelty, 1996, pp. 105-23.

3 Branch et al., 1998, p. xi.

4 For a description, see *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1975, pp. 63-65.

5 See *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1975, pp. 62-63.

“[eats] grass in the hills with the gazelle and [lurks] with wild beasts at the water-holes; he [has] joy of the water with the herds of wild game.”⁶

In the story, when a hunter sees Enkidu in the mountains for the first time, he is terrified by the sight of this wild man, and this is what he tells his own father back at home about Enkidu:

“Father, there is a man, unlike any other, who comes down from the hills. He is the strongest in the world, he is like an immortal from heaven. He ranges over the hills with wild beasts and eats grass; he ranges through your land and comes down to the wells. I am afraid and dare not go near him. He fills in the pits which I dig and tears up my traps set for the game, he helps the beasts to escape and now they slip through my fingers.”⁷

Enkidu protects the fauna and flora of the environment from human incursions and exploitation. He thus tries to preserve the ecological harmony in nature, which he shares with wild life, but which is subverted and ruined by the hunter. Probably this is the earliest literary problematization of the environment threatened by man and protected by what one may call today, somewhat anachronistically, an ecologically sensitive environmentalist. Similarly, Homer’s references to the natural world can be regarded as ecologically meaningful, especially when he describes forest fires,⁸ the wild fowl with loud cries, flying here and there on the meadow by the river Cayster⁹ [the “Küçük Menderes” in Western Turkey], mountains covered by thick fog,¹⁰ the roaring of the sea, and huge waves breaking on the land,¹¹ the forest on the island of Calypso,¹² Odysseus’ boar hunting on Mount Parnassus,¹³ and many other natural scenes. As for the Bible, which certainly embodies various ecologically suggestive expressions and passages, one may, for example, recall Betsy S. Hilbert’s ecological reading of Deuteronomy.¹⁴ Indeed, in view of such examples, one may maintain that, through its varied representations of the environment, literature has always provided instructive examples whereby the enhancement of an environmental awareness and the dissemination of a constructive perception for a sustainable environment can be achieved. Moreover, by problematizing, depicting and discussing environmental issues, literature has also emphasized the need for everybody to revisit his or her cultural values and assumptions about nature and its conservation. Therefore, literary studies with relation to environmental representation in texts can be instructive and upgrade man’s awareness of the natural world. This is certainly the ultimate use of ecocriticism. In this respect, as Michael Branch and his colleagues have asserted,

6 *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1975, p. 63.

7 *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1975, p. 63.

8 See Homer, *The Iliad*, I, 85 [II. 455-56] (All the references are to the volume and page numbers; the references in square brackets indicate the book and verse numbers of the original Greek text).

9 See Homer, *The Iliad*, I, 85 [II. 459-63].

10 See Homer, *The Iliad*, I, 117 [III, 10-12].

11 See Homer, *The Iliad*, I, 185 [IV, 422-26].

12 See Homer, *The Odyssey*, I, 187 [V, 237-40].

13 See Homer, *The Odyssey*, II, 259-61 [XIX. 428-54].

14 See Hilbert, 2001, pp. 29-40.

“ecocriticism suggests means by which we might read literary texts with a new appreciation for what they reveal about the complex of relationships that mediate interactions between humans and their environments. Environmentally informed literary scholarship offers a profound opportunity to read literature with a fresh sensitivity to the emergent voice of nature.”¹⁵

It is therefore the main focus of this article to revisit Shakespeare ecocritically and demonstrate how he speaks to us environmentally across the centuries. Indeed, one may state that, by his display of an environmental awareness, he becomes our contemporary in terms of values. Thus, he can be presented as an important voice in what has been rightly termed “the environmental humanities.”¹⁶ However, among some Shakespearean critics, there seems to be prevalent a considerable degree of scepticism and, one may add, even cynicism about scholarly attempts for an ecocritical reading of Shakespeare’s texts. In this regard, it has been argued by Simon Estok, for example, that “ecocriticism, with Shakespeare at least, has largely failed to distinguish itself from the values of very clearly non-ecocritical work that has already been done with Shakespeare.”¹⁷ The argument has been further maintained as follows:

“To many Shakespeareans, ecocriticism seems not to be new and instead to be like old thematicism and nature studies. Many Shakespeareans want to know what ecocriticism can offer, either methodologically or theoretically, that will shed new light and meaning on their field of study.”¹⁸

In fact, what follows in the rest of this article has not been intended as a response to a polemical position as such. Perhaps it is in consequence of such a view that, in current ecocritical studies of literature, to quote Estok again, “Shakespeare has remained excluded.”¹⁹ If one recalls that “one of ecocriticism’s most important tasks [...] is expanding its boundaries [...] to address a wider spectrum of texts”²⁰ and that “ecocriticism offers a critical perspective that can enliven any literary and theoretical field”,²¹ it would not be out of place to revisit Shakespeare in terms of environmental sensitivity and situate him in an ecocritical context.

Obviously, among Shakespeare’s plays, it is *As You Like It* that is embedded with a remarkable amount of environmental reference and that explicitly displays some degree of ecological sensitivity. Although the play has been traditionally regarded as one of Shakespeare’s festive comedies, in which, through the depiction of an idealized and romantic pastoral setting, the social and moral values of the country are metaphorically indicated and celebrated against the moral decadence and political depri-

15 Branch et al., 1998, p. xiii.

16 Howarth, 1998, p. 6.

17 Estok, 2005, p. 109.

18 Estok, 2005, p.109.

19 Estok, 2005, p. 109.

20 Armbruster and Wallace, 2001, p. 2.

21 Armbruster and Wallace, 2001, pp. 3-4.

vations of the city,²² ecologically it also problematizes man's relationship with the natural world and, hence, can be read as an environmental allegory. The Forest of Arden, in which the action of the play is set, in fact becomes an ambivalent epitome of the natural world; it is not only idealized and romanticized in pastoral terms but also depicted as a kind of wilderness manipulated and exploited by human beings. Hence, it becomes a metaphorical amalgamation of the pastoral, on the one hand, as a stylized and literary environment and the wild on the other as a biotic formation of the physical environment.²³ In other words, on the one hand, it is inhabited by a community of morally unspoiled, generously hospitable, innocently wise and self-content shepherds, who lead a simple, frugal, carefree and secluded pastoral life;²⁴ yet, on the other, it is a wild place of the "fat and greasy" deer,²⁵ deadly snakes,²⁶ ferocious lions,²⁷ thorny shrubs such as hawthorns and brambles,²⁸ osiers by "murmuring" streams,²⁹ oaks, "whose boughs [are] moss'd with age,/And high top bald with dry antiquity,"³⁰ palms,³¹ and olives.³² It is indeed presented both as a place with "so quiet and so sweet a style,"³³ which evidently evokes the traditional pastoral concept of *locus amoenus*, and also as a "desert" place³⁴ or an "uncouth forest,"³⁵ which has been invaded by an exiled group of urbanites ready to adapt themselves to it and exploit it for their own human needs. This ambivalent nature of the Forest of Arden is explicitly reflected in the Duke Senior's initial speech, in which the rigours of the physical environment are tolerated through the pleasures of its pastoral solitude and simplicity:

"Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,

22 For moral and other thematic interpretations of the play through the juxtaposition of the city (or the court) and the country as well as through a contrastive discussion of pastoralism and urbanism, see, for example, Laroque, 1991, pp.193, 232, and 235; also Umunç, 1994, especially pp. 135-38.

23 For a passing discussion of the pastoral and the wild with reference to African American culture at large and Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* in particular, see Bennett, 2001, especially pp. 195-97.

24 See *As You Like It*, III.ii.11-75 and III. iii.1-49. Note: the order of the reference numerals indicates the act, scene and line numbers respectively in the plays cited in the article.

25 *Ibid.*, II.ii.55.

26 See *ibid.*, IV.iii.107-13.

27 See *ibid.*, IV.iii.113-18, 126-31, and 146-47.

28 See *ibid.*, III.ii.352-53.

29 *Ibid.*, IV.iii.79.

30 *Ibid.*, IV.iii.104-05.

31 See *ibid.*, III.ii.173.

32 See *ibid.*, III.v.75 and IV.iii.77.

33 *Ibid.*, II.i.20.

34 *Ibid.*, II.i.23, and II.vii.110.

35 *Ibid.*, II.vi.6.

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'.
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."³⁶

The Duke Senior has fled from his younger brother Frederick's political conspiracy of usurpation and, together with his courtly entourage, taken refuge in the Forest of Arden.³⁷ By doing so, he and his courtiers have actually removed themselves from "th'infected world"³⁸ of the court, where all kinds of danger and moral corruption prevail, and come into nature, through whose ecology they are to be morally self-educated in humility, charity, tolerance, frugality and so forth. Moreover, it is from this same decadent world of the court that the Duke's daughter Rosalind, her cousin Celia, the clown Touchstone, Rosalind's lover Orlando, and his old servant Adam have fled also to take refuge in the forest.³⁹ So, the ecological world of the forest, which they have all come to inhabit, becomes not only a school for their moral education but also, more importantly, the new environment in which their survival depends on their efforts to come to terms with its geographical and climatic circumstances. Hence, they must suspend, if not cast away, their urban manners and preconceived ideas about nature and establish a harmonious relationship with it. So they must undergo a process of adaptation, which requires a new environmental awareness.⁴⁰ In other words, their anthropocentric perception of the environment as a natural resource for exploitation and manipulation must be replaced by an ecological perception that, to quote Joseph Meeker, in it "plants, animals, mountains, seas, and sky [... are] components of a complete and integrated system in which human beings find or create their proper places."⁴¹ Although the Duke Senior and his courtiers tend at the outset to display an anthropocentric attitude towards the environment by maintaining their courtly habits such as hunting,⁴² feasting,⁴³ and revelling,⁴⁴ they soon adapt themselves to their new environment and learn how to cope in it with

36 *Ibid.*, II.i.1-17.

37 See *ibid.*, I.i.99-119.

38 *Ibid.*, II.vii.60.

39 See *ibid.*, I.iii.86-134, II.iii.1-76, II.iv.1-16, and II.vi.1-18.

40 On adaptation and manipulation as the two contrary human attitudes towards the environment, see Meeker, 1997, pp. 4-5, 20, and 51.

41 Meeker, 1997, p. 7.

42 See *As You Like It*, II.i.21 and IV.ii.1-5.

43 See *ibid.*, II.v.28-29 and 59, II. vii. 1-133 and 167-170..

44 See *ibid.*, II.v.1-28 and 34-54, and II. vii.173-193.

what the Duke calls “shrewd days and nights”.⁴⁵ However, among them, it is the Duke’s old councillor Jacques who, like the old shepherd Corin,⁴⁶ is portrayed as ecologically the most sensitive character in the play. For instance, out of his environmental concern, he is strongly opposed to the Duke’s hunting, which he metaphorically regards as man’s ecological subversion of nature. Weeping over a deer wounded by hunters in the forest, he deplores man’s incursion into the quiet world of the animals in the forest. Also the Duke Senior himself is not quite happy in hunting the animals in their own geography, but he knows he has to kill them in order to survive in what he thinks to be an inhospitable environment. All this is clearly emphasized through the dialogue between the Duke Senior and the First Lord:

“*Duke S.* Come, shall we go and kill us venison?
And yet it irks me the poor dappled fools,
Being native burghers of this desert city,
Should in their own confines with forked heads
Have their round haunches gor’d.
First Lord. Indeed, my lord,
The melancholy Jacques grieves at that,
And in that kind swears you do more usurp
Than doth your brother that hath banish’d you.”⁴⁷

Indeed, for Jacques, the Duke Senior’s hunting of the animals in the forest is essentially an act of exploitation and, hence, his usurpation of the animals’ habitat. He therefore calls the Duke Senior and his hunting nobles “mere usurpers [and] tyrants”.⁴⁸ Jacques further protests that ecologically it is unacceptable “to fright the animals and to kill them up / In their assign’d and native dwelling-place”.⁴⁹ If one recalls that, as Keith Thomas has clearly pointed out, “in Tudor and Stuart England the traditional view was that the world had been created for man’s sake and that other species were meant to be subordinate to his wishes and needs,”⁵⁰ Shakespeare’s ecological discourse as such, which is strongly worded through his character Jacques in the play, certainly signifies a sensitivity somewhat unusual for his time. This sensitivity in the play is further manifested when Jacques makes the following request to the young lover Orlando, who has been carving love poems for Rosalind in the barks of trees in the forest:⁵¹ “I pray you mar no more trees with writing love-songs in their barks”.⁵² What has been so seriously voiced by Jacques about the damage to trees has its humorous parallel in Rosalind’s own

45 *Ibid.*, V.iv.180.

46 See *ibid.*, III.ii.26-30 and 71-75, where the old and wise shepherd Corin praises pastoral happiness, which is evidently related to an ecological sensitivity.

47 *Ibid.*, II.i. 21-28.

48 *Ibid.*, II.i. 61.

49 *Ibid.*, II.i. 62-63.

50 Thomas, 1984, p. 17.

51 See *As You Like It*, III.ii.1-10.

52 *Ibid.*, III.ii. 255-56.

words when, disguised as a young swaggerer⁵³ and “a saucy lackey,”⁵⁴ she speaks to Orlando who she knows does the carving:

“There is a man haunts the forest that
abuses our young plants with carving ‘Rosalind’
on their barks; hangs odes upon hawthorns and
elegies on brambles; all, forsooth, deifying the
name of Rosalind.”⁵⁵

The ecological sensitivity displayed by Jacques and parodied by Rosalind as such can also be seen in the environmental attitudes of the other urbanites in the play. For instance, for Celia, who has fled with Rosalind from the morally polluted court,⁵⁶ the Forest of Arden is a place of “liberty” rather than “banishment.”⁵⁷ She has been so impressed by the peace and freedom provided by this natural environment that, like the Duke Senior and his retinue, she easily adapts herself to the new conditions and considers her new home a pleasure: “I like this place, /And willingly could waste my time in it.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Oliver, who has also come to the Forest of Arden with the purpose to look for his brother Orlando,⁵⁹ is prepared to give up all his urban life and “live and die a shepherd” in it.⁶⁰ All this concern with the ecological and environmental nature of the Forest of Arden reaches a climax at the end of the play when the ecologically over-sensitive Jacques decides not to return to the court together with the Duke Senior and the others, but to continue to live in the forest as an anchorite.⁶¹ Obviously, from an environmental point of view, Jacques’s ultimate adoption of an ascetic way of life in the natural setting of the Forest of Arden can be regarded as a graphic indication of Shakespeare’s own ecological sensitivity.

Besides *As You Like It*, in *The Winter’s Tale* Shakespeare presents through a pastoral setting a similar kind of dichotomy, which involves another juxtaposition of the country and the court in terms of moral values and excellence. Especially through the story of Perdita, who was rejected in infancy by her father Leontes, King of Sicily,⁶² but found and raised as a foundling by the Bohemian shepherds,⁶³ virtuous naturalness is set against courtly artificiality. Perdita, who has grown up as a pastoral beauty “of most rare note”⁶⁴ in a physically unpolluted and unspoiled environment, has been tutored by nature

53 See *ibid.*, I.iii.110-21.

54 *Ibid.*, III.ii.290-91.

55 *Ibid.*, III.ii.350-54.

56 See *Ibid.*, I.iii.96-134 and II.iv.1-8.

57 *Ibid.*, I.iii.134.

58 *Ibid.*, II.iv.92-93.

59 See *ibid.*, III.i.5-12 and IV.iii.75-180.

60 *Ibid.*, V.ii.12.

61 See *ibid.*, V.iv.192 and 194-95.

62 See *The Winter’s Tale*, II.iii.172-82.

63 See *Ibid.*, III.iii.68-78 and IV.iv.1 ff.

64 *Ibid.*, IV.ii.43.

whereby she has become the moral embodiment of a naturalness which is unpolluted by courtly artificiality and corruption. Hence, her immaculate physical beauty⁶⁵ metaphorically manifests her moral perfection, which is revealed through her humility, chastity, hospitality, generosity, self-restraint, inborn nobility, and prudence. Moreover, as one can infer from her debate with the courtly Polixenes,⁶⁶ she is ecologically so learned about nature that she demonstrates this through her extensive knowledge of flowers and their seasonal characteristics. For her, carnations, gillyflowers, lavenders, mints, savories, marjorams, marigolds, daffodils, violets, primroses, oxlips, and lilies each not only biologically conform for their growth to the conditions of the seasons but also, by their growth, represent the cycle of the seasons.⁶⁷ Through this catalogue of flowers, Shakespeare once again reveals his ecological sensitivity, which can also be witnessed in Ophelia's catalogue of flowers in *Hamlet*. This catalogue includes rosemary, pansy, fennel, columbine, rue, daisy, and violet.⁶⁸ Although Shakespeare uses the flowers here as a metaphorical reference in order to illustrate, from Ophelia's point of view, certain human characteristics such as faithfulness, infidelity, repentance or frustrated love, his choice of them certainly indicates some careful observation of the natural world and a closely sensitive relationship with it. Also the depiction of Ophelia's suicide by drowning herself in the waters of a stream is given through the description of a setting which is ecologically attractive but has a treacherous layout; Queen Gertrude describes to Laertes through a rich set of environmental references the circumstances of Ophelia's death:

“There is a willow grows askant a brook
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
 Therewith fantastic garlands did she make,
 Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
 That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
 But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
 There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
 Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
 When down her weedy trophies and herself
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
 And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
 Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
 As one incapable of her own distress,
 Or like a creature native and indued

Unto that element. But long it could not be
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
 Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
 To muddy death.”⁶⁹

65 See *ibid.*, IV.iv.1-3 and 77-79.

66 See *ibid.*, IV.iv.70-108.

67 See *ibid.*, IV.iv.79-135.

68 See *Hamlet*, IV.v.173-82.

69 *Ibid.*, IV.vii.165-82.

One may suggest that, through such an environmentally precise description, Shakespeare seems to have intended to play down the horror of Ophelia's tragic death and turn the scene into a pleasance where Ophelia with her garland of flowers and her touching song becomes part of nature and ultimately attains peace and comfort in it through death.

Similar to *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's dichotomic depiction of the natural environment not only as an ecologically pristine harmony but also the subversion of this harmony through human manipulation and exploitation can further be seen in *The Tempest*. The play is set in an environment which is ecologically most attractive but is dangerously vulnerable to human manipulation and exploitation. In other words, the distant tropical island, on which Prospero, the deposed duke of Milan, lives in exile as a magician with his daughter Miranda, has a natural setting which gives it a paradisaical appearance. Indeed, it has a "subtle, tender, and delicate" climate,⁷⁰ and "the air breathes [...] here most sweetly,"⁷¹ and, as the old councillor Gonzalo puts it, "here is everything advantageous to life."⁷² However, this ecologically perfect environment is undermined by a fierce storm which Prospero artificially creates through his magical power in order to take his revenge on his enemies, Alonso and his company.⁷³ Indeed, for Miranda, who begs her father to give up his magical manipulation of the forces of nature, the storm becomes a state of utter desolation, in which human survival is made impossible:

"If by your Art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! a brave vessel,
(Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her,)
Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perish'd!
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or ere
It should the good ship so have swallow'd, and
The fraughting souls within her."⁷⁴

Parabolically, the storm and its violent effects on humans and nature may be regarded as a graphic representation of the kind of fears and anxieties that we today face through the destruction of the environment. If one were to re-read this storm episode analogically by relating it to our own time, one would tend to see an allegorical affinity between Prospero's manipulation of the forces of nature for a destructive purpose and our abuse of nuclear power, which poses an apocalyptic threat to the life and

70 *The Tempest*, II.i.41-42.

71 *Ibid.*, II.i.45.

72 *Ibid.*, II.i.48.

73 See *ibid.*, I.i.1-67.

74 *Ibid.*, II.ii.1-13.

environment on Earth. Man's harmony with his natural environment is constantly being undermined and could be lost irretrievably.

To conclude, Shakespeare was certainly not an environmentalist in the modern sense. It would be anachronistic and unjustifiable to think of Shakespeare as such. However, as we have tried to demonstrate above by reference to the environmentally suggestive passages in some of his plays, obviously he was an ecologically sensitive playwright and can therefore be related to our environmental literacy. In this respect, one may recall the following statement that gestures to the need to revisit the ecologically relevant literary texts of the past for re-reading and re-interpretation:

“If we are to understand and devise effective solutions for today's environmental threats, we must locate them within their larger historical, societal, and cultural setting”.⁷⁵

In this search for environmental solutions, and also in formulating effective answers to environmental questions, there is a constant need for the nurturing and enhancement of environmental awareness. In other words, we need to create a society of ecologically sensitive and caring human beings. This can be done not only through scientific research and publications alone but also through the environmental humanities which also include literary scholarship and representation. In this regard, as Howarth has put it,

“[while] the scientist's task is to predict, the humanist's task is to remember. To remember with truth and compassion is to know the past and take steps toward a viable future.”⁷⁶

Therefore, the reading and understanding of literature with an environmental perception has a didactic, paedogogic and inspiring effect on people. In this regard, Shakespeare can be considered a major *exemplum* from the literary past.

75 Quoted in Slovic, 2002, p. ix.

76 Howarth, 1998, p. 8.

References

I. Texts and Primary Sources

- The Epic of Gilgamesh*. (1975). Trans. N.K. Sandars. Rev.ed. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Homer. (1971-1976). *The Iliad*. Trans. A.T. Murray; 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library Series 170-71. 1924-25. London: Heinemann.
- Homer. (1974-1975). *The Odyssey*. Trans. A.T. Murray. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library Series 104-05. 1919. London: Heinemann.
- Shakespeare, William. (1996). *As You Like It*. Ed. Agnes Latham. Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series. London: Routledge.
- Shakespeare, William. (1994). *The Winter's Tale*. Ed. J.H.P. Pafford. . Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series. London: Routledge.
- Shakespeare, William. (1994). *The Tempest*. Ed. Frank Kermode. Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series. London: Routledge.
- Shakespeare, William. (1995). *Hamlet*. Ed. Harold Jenkins. Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series. London: Routledge.

II. Secondary Sources

- Armbruster, Karla, and Wallace, Kathleen R. (2001). "Introduction: Why Go Beyond Nature Writing, and Where to?" *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia: pp.1-25.
- Bennett, Michael. (2001). "Anti-Pastoralism, Frederick Douglass, and the Nature of Slavery". *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia: pp.195-210.
- Branch, Michael P. et al., eds. (1998). *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*. Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press.
- Branch, Michael P., and Slovic, Scott, eds. (2003). *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Estok, Simon. (2005). "An Introduction to Shakespeare and Ecocriticism: the Special Cluster." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 12.2: pp.109-17.
- Fromm, Harold, and Glotfelty, Cheryl, eds. (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*; University of Georgia Press: Athens, GA,
- Hilbert, Betsy. S. (2001). "Beyond 'Thou Shalt Not': An Ecocritic Reads Deuteronomy." *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia: pp.29-40.
- Howarth, William. (1998). "Ego or Ecocriticism? Looking for Common Ground." *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*. Ed. Michael P. Branch et al., Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press: pp.3-8.
- Laroque, François. (1991). *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*; Trans. Janet Lloyd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mazel, David, ed. (2001). *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Meeker, Joseph M. (1997). *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and A Play Ethic*. 3rd ed. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Slovic, Scott. (2002). "Foreword." *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory, and The Environment*. Ed. Steven Rosendale. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press: pp. vii-xi.
- Thomas, Keith. (1984). *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*. London: Penguin.
- Umunc, Himmet. (1994). "'This Shepherd's Life': The Renaissance English Pastoral." *Journal of English Language and Literature*, No. 2 (December): pp.127-142.