

**Ecocritical Consciousness in Shakespeare's
*The Winter's Tale***

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the eco critical elements in *The Winter's Tale* (1610-1611) by William Shakespeare (1564 –1616), which is an outstanding example of the literary writing communicating ecological consciousness. Having examined William Shakespeare's contribution to understanding nature it can be stated that nature is one of the key concepts of the author. He was highly aware of the nature and humans connection, importance of nature as both utilitarian and spiritual object. That is why Shakespeare's concept of nature is colored with mainly positive tones. The most typical words for natural world are "fine" and "beauty". In contrast to these words one can see the ugliness of the humans' world – "foul", that causes climate change, population growth, deforestation, biologically degrading cultivation practices. His creative approach to early modern ecologies licenses critical practices that extend the limits of his period's geophysical knowledge, and that suggests productive analogies with our ecological challenges. Recent ecocritics have been seizing such opportunities to help people rethink environmentally destructive economic and social paradigms.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ecocriticism, nature, symbolism.

الوعي النقدي البيئي في مسرحية شكسبير "حكاية شتاء"
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الملخص :

تركز الدراسة الحالية على عناصر النقد البيئي في مسرحية حكاية شتاء (١٦١٠-١٦١١) للمسرحي وليام شكسبير (١٥٦٤-١٦١٦)، التي تعدّ مثالا بارزا على الكتابة الأدبية التي تعبّر عن وعي بيئي. وبعد تفحص إسهامات شكسبير في فهم الطبيعة، يمكن القول إن الطبيعة واحدة من المفاهيم الأساسية لدى المؤلف المذكور. فقد كان مدركا جدا للعلاقة بين الطبيعة والانسان، وأهمية الطبيعة بوصفها موضوعا نفعيا وروحيا. لذا فإن مفهوم شكسبير للطبيعة تلوّته نبرات إيجابية. وأبرز الكلمات التي استخدمها لوصف الطبيعة فهي "جيدة" و "جميلة". وبخلاف هاتين الكلمتين، يمكن للمرء أن يلاحظ قبح عالم البشر – "المروّع" الذي يسبب التغير المناخي، والنم السكاني، وتجريف الغابات، والممارسات التنموية المسيئة بايولوجيا أو احيائيا. إن مقارنة شكسبير الخلاقة للدراسات البيئية الحداثوية المبكرة قد اجازت الممارسات النقدية التي تفوق المعرفة الجيو- فيزيائية في عصره ، وهذا يقترح مقارنات وعلائق منتجة فيما يخص التحديات البيئية التي تواجهنا. ما يرح النقاد البيئيون الحاليون يغتنمون هذه الفرص لمساعدة الناس على إعادة التفكير بالمخططات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية المدمرة من الناحية البيئية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شكسبير، حكاية شتاء، النقد البيئي، الطبيعة، الرمزية.

II. Introduction

Ecocriticism is an important trend of the modern study of literature, as it is targeted at finding out the roots of present problems as well as seeking for their solutions. And the main problem of the modernity that is central within ecocriticism is the problem of ecology. Humans are becoming more and more consumptive which leads to thoughtless nature exploitation causing crises of different kinds – exhaustion of natural resources, glacier melting, water, soil and air pollution, some natural disasters, and so on. These crises threaten not only nature itself, but also humans' existence. Though it is not a problem of survival right now, humans should take it with all responsibility and bring the next generation up with the understanding of nature central place in our lives.

Here the writings of the greatest minds become the most effective tool, that both shows us the problem and gives us the solution. Quite often ecocritical literary studying allows to see the attitude of humans' consumptive relation towards nature and to find a way to change such an

attitude. Surely, one of the significant authors that contributed to the development of nature consciousness was William Shakespeare. As one of the greatest English minds he could not but touch the problems of nature in his writings. Manifold of metaphors, allusions, comparisons of human and nature make Shakespeare the poet of nature. The present research attempts to prove the development of nature consciousness in *The Winter's tale*, one of the brightest Shakespeare's works.

Thus, the significance of the study manifests itself in the growing global concern about nature degradation as the result of its exploitation by humans as well as their economic, military and other activities. It is high time that humans take measures to protect the Earth before its nature has deteriorated. And one of the most reasonable, long-term and effective ways here is shaping ecological thinking by means of literature.

III. Problem of the research

This study focuses on the problem of nature treatment that is reflected in the play of William Shakespeare *The Winter's Tale*. The researchers believe that it contains deep ecological meaning, that binds humans and nature and motivates progressive action. To solve the problem the following research questions are posed:

1. How does William Shakespeare represent nature in the play?
2. What symbols does nature embody in the play and with which words these symbols are represented?
3. What is the place of the Shakespeare's concept of nature in the historical context?

IV. Methodology

Eco-theory (ecocriticism, or green studies) is a science that studies the connection of culture and society to the natural world. The most common definition of it was provided by C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm (1996, p. xviii):

“... the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts,

Ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies.”

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study and it uses the methods of different sciences to study the ecological values in a text: What is exactly meant by nature? and whether “place” can be examined distinctively like gender, class or race? What are the views about wilderness and has it changed through the history? Is it the same view in the modern time? Within this research the researchers apply the following methods:

- ecocritical analysis of the William Shakespeare’s play that allows to figure out the ecological ideas of the author;
- comparative method that allows to find out the peculiarities of Shakespeare’s nature concept;
- historical and literary method that allows to determine the place of the Shakespeare’s ecological ideas in the historical context;
- descriptive method that allows to present the results of the conducted research.

The methodology of the research is based on axiological approach that supposes considering literary writing as a source of “valuable” information, or ecologically significant information in the frame of ecocriticism.

V. An Ecocritical Reading of *The Winter’s Tale*

For its poetic quality, *The Winter’s Tale* needs not to fear comparison even with the greatest of Shakespeare’s work. It abounds with such beautiful and suggestive passages as these words of Hermione’s: “*You may ride’s / With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere / With spur we heat an acre.*” (Shakespeare, 1610, I, ii, 166-168)

As sheer poetry taken out of its context, this is a vibrant image, but its value is enhanced by the fact that it fits the whole theme of the play. Indeed, it contains in its very words: the opposition of love and tyranny. There is very little in English poetry outside Shakespeare to equal it. If Shakespeare's last plays are the most poetic ones, they are plays in which characters themselves are often poetically conceived, and they are plays in which the concentration of meaning of many passages reaches the extreme of an ellipse. At this point, should it be supposed that the poetry is only the surface, that there is a considerable lack in more profound symbolic unity which gives shape to and explains the whole.

Nevertheless, one must keep one's eyes wide open to one central difficulty. The fact remains that regardless of how much we admire *The Winter's Tale*, it has not been highly successful on the stage. Its dramatic quality is uneven; it is full of excitement in parts, but dragging in others. In characterization, the play falls far short of the great tragedies like *Antony and Cleopatra*. The final speeches fall short of entire satisfaction but leave a reader even just a little puzzled. The only explanation that can be offered is that sometime towards the end of the Middle Ages or at the beginning of the Renaissance, the unified sensibility to be seen in works of art where a satisfying surface meaning is perfectly integrated with deeper layers of significance that was lost, not to be recovered since. The many attempts since Ibsen in our age to reintroduce symbolism into the drama, have rarely met with full success. It is often felt somehow or another, either that the symbolism is superimposed, or that the story lacks in vitality of surface interest. The researchers think that Shakespeare already had to face this problem in *The Winter's Tale*, and partly failed to master it or overcome it. (Martin, 2015, p. 103).

The core of the meaning of *The Winter's Tale* is contained in the important discussion on art and nature in Act IV, which attracts scientists' attention mainly by its formality of tone (Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv). It occurs early in the scene of the sheep-shearing festival when Perdita, "*the mistress o' the feast*," presents different flowers to all the guests, befitting their respective ages. The only flowers she does not favour are carnations and gillyflowers "*which some call Nature's bastards*." Asked by Polixenes the reason for her aversion, she says:

For I have heard it said
There is an Art which in their piedness shares
With great creating Nature.
(Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 1960-1962)

Polixenes then convincingly argues that Nature is the essence of art, as it fulfils an important function:

You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend Nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is Nature.

(Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 1967-1972)

Perdita apparently agrees (“So it is”), but when urged by Polixenes to take the consequence and cultivate gillyflowers, she objects firmly:

No more than were I painted I would wish
This youth should say ’twere well, and only therefore
Desire to breed by me.

(Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 1978-1980)

This strange discussion raises several questions: what does Polixenes mean by art and nature? And what does Perdita mean? Why does Perdita agree with Polixenes theoretically? And yet not follow his counsel, but in fact, reassert her initial position? Why does Shakespeare make Polixenes, too ironically break his counsel of marrying "a gentler scion to the wildest stock," when shortly after he objects to the engagement of his son to a mere shepherdess? Lastly, is there any relation between Perdita's theory of art and that exhibited later in the supposed statue of Julio Romano? The following discussion will have for its aim the answer to these questions (Martin, 2015, p. 89).

The imagery, as well as the fable itself, suggest four themes, all of which are closely interwoven and here separated only for convenience' sake: first, that of the identity, which can be compared with nature, between parents and children – symbolically, Mamillius and Perdita are phases or parts of the changing personality of Leontes. Second, that of summer and winter of tire rebirth of nature, the return of flowers and the sun. Third, that of youth, age, death, and resurrection – of man's purity in childhood, his loss of it through sin, and after a long period of struggle, sorrow, and repentance during which all selfishness is cleansed from his nature, his attainment of permanent peace with the help of grace. Fourth and last, that of the art of inspiration or the creative imagination, its place in our lives and its relation to nature.

The theme of identity permeates the play, and attention to it will solve one of the main difficulties obstructing the path of a symbolical interpretation, that is, the large number of characters. At once, in the opening scenes, the likeness of Mamillius to his father Leontes is emphasized. Leontes comments on it:

What, hast smutched thy nose?
They say it is a copy out of mine...

(Shakespeare, 1610, I, ii, 199-200)

Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have,
To be full like me; yet they say, we are
Almost as like as eggs.

(Shakespeare, 1610, I, ii, 207-209)

Shortly after that, Mamillius himself remarks: "*I am like you, they say*" (Shakespeare, 1610, I, ii, 299). It seems odd, too, that Leontes should address Mamillius, even if playfully, with animal imagery (Shakespeare, 1610, I, ii) symbolic of his state of mind. Similarly, the main argument of Paulina's appeal, in the scene when she holds high the little child, is to demonstrate Leontes' features in its face:

Behold, my Lords,
Although the print be little, the whole matter
And copy of the father, eye, nose, lip,
The trick o' his frown, his forehead, nay the valley,
The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek.
His smiles,
The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger.
(Shakespeare, 1610, II, iii, 1050-1056)

Paulina's primary purpose is, of course, to show that the child cannot be Polixenes' daughter. Nevertheless, the similarity to Leontes is curiously exaggerated and moreover supported by the remainder of the play. Likewise, the similarity between Perdita and Hermione is stressed. When on her flight with Florizel from Bohemia, Perdita arrives at the Sicilian court, Leontes, unaware that she is his daughter, gazes at her beauty with such amazement that Paulina feels drawn to utter a warning. Leontes answers: "*I thought of her [Hermione],/ Even in these looks I made.*" (Shakespeare, 1610, V, I, 3098-3099)

The close degree of resemblance, symbolizing a degree of identity between the children and both Leontes and Hermione forms a significant fact in this play.

Furthermore, Polixenes, in Act IV, in his attitude towards his son Florizel reminds the reader of the brutal attitude of Leontes towards his child Perdita. Florizel has to flee from his father's wrath after Perdita has been threatened:

If ever henceforth thou
These rural latches to his entrance open,

Or hoop his body more with thy embraces,
 I will devise a death as cruel for thee
 As thou art tender to it.
 (Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 2359-2363)

In this play, therefore, parents are depicted as on the one side closely resembling, and on the other, as hostile to their children. The conflict is resolved only in the final scenes when friendship and love are re-established and celebrated only in the bosom of nature.

The theme of winter and summer and the rebirth of nature is evident on the literal level, but in it, there is a spiritual significance as well. It is part of the whole play, rather than merely the pastoral scenes. The opening scenes take place during winter, and that is why Mamillius starts telling a winter's tale. This winter's tale is a symbolical description of Leontes himself in an inward state of winter, but the tale itself is only completed when death has given way to life and winter to spring.

The passage in *The Winter's Tale* (Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 1957-1975) where Polixenes and Perdita discuss the merits of such 'artificial' flowers as carnations and gillyflowers have been widely and justly admired. It is one of the graceful and poetic passages of Shakespeare for it contains one of keenest intellectual "aperçus." Over and above the pastoral charm of the setting, Perdita herself, and the fragrant talk of country flowers, there is a pretty ambiguity in action. As Furness has noted, Polixenes in defending the art of grafting has unknowingly stated the relation between his royal son and the shepherd maid with his metaphor of marrying a gentler scion to the wildest stock. Also, Perdita cheerfully assents to the figure, if not to the application Polixenes intends; while the audience is familiar with the play and secure in the knowledge that Perdita is a true princess. After all, she enjoys the further irony of the maid's accepting the partly false analogy to justify her marriage with Florizel, urged by the man who mistakenly thinks he has the most interest in opposing the match.

Polixenes' defence of the carnations and fillyflowers which Perdita disdains:

Perdita:

For I have heard it said
 There is an art which in their piedness shares
 With great creating Nature.

Polixenes:

Say there be;
Yet Nature is made better by no mean
But Nature makes that mean; so, over that art,
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art
That Nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race: this is an art
Which does mend Nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is Nature (Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 1960-1973)

It is couched in terms of one of the many "nature and art" relationships are familiar in ancient and Renaissance literature. No commentator could hope to canvass the background of Shakespeare's idea thoroughly. To exhaust even a fraction of the relevant parallels in the literature preceding Shakespeare would probably require large volumes. Nevertheless, surprisingly few similarities for the passage as a whole have been noted by the commentators, so far at least as the researcher observes it; and it may be worthwhile to indicate something of their antiquity and extent (MacFaul, 2015, p. 42).

Shakespeare's thought is adumbrated though and rather equivocally anticipated in a saying attributed to Democritus: "*Nature and culture are much alike; for culture changes a man, but also through this change makes nature.*" A clearer parallel for Shakespeare's conception occurs in one of the answers Plato supplies to the sophistic antithesis of "nature" and "art": "*Law itself ... and art... exist by nature or by a cause not inferior to nature, since, according to right reason, they are the offspring of mind.*" (Manley, 1980, p. 28) Other such classical antecedents of Polixenes' thought could be supplied, but probably enough have been indicated to show that the idea of "art" as a part of cosmic nature or as made by nature was commonplace in antiquity. It would be likewise possible to cite a multitude of pre-Shakespearian parallels for this usual from many fields of Renaissance thought. Here, the researcher shall confine his citations to the field of literary theory, with which the researcher is familiar, and conclude with one

which Shakespeare may have had in mind when he formulated the speech of Polixenes (Scott, 2014, p. 195).

The idea of cosmic nature as guiding and controlling the development of poetic art occurs in Petrarch: "*Nihil nisi naturae consentaneum lex poetica fingi sivit 'Nothing can be molded without nature to allow the law of poetry'* "; and this normative conception of 'nature' is further applied to all literary art and human arts in general by a succession of Renaissance writers in Italy, France, and England. Some discussion of the relations between "art" and "nature" – usually designed to justify the conceptions of the "arts" of rhetoric or poetry and to define their limits – became a conventional part of most Renaissance treatises on literary theory. Thus, Bernardino Daniello opens his *Poetica* (1536) with a discourse on this matter in which, after granting that "*every art and science has its beginnings from nature*", he argues that the writer's "natural" gifts should be supplemented, disciplined, and perfected by the literary "art" with which his little book is mainly concerned. In support, he introduces an agricultural illustration in something like Polixenes' vein, if not in application to his precise contention. Many things in nature, says Daniello, are improved by human art, and not least the useful products of the soil:

For nature produces what is useful to human life mixed indiscriminately with thorns and brambles. Wherefore, if the diligent cultivator does not root out the sterile offenders from the good and useful growths, he will reap many tares and but little corn or oats. But let us look a little higher, from the products of the soil to the trees. Do we not here find, very often, something comparable? Assuredly, since, for the most part, trees are apt to degenerate and bring forth sour or insipid fruit if left to their own development. But if these are diligently and artfully grafted with the proper scions of other fruit trees, the fruits become sweet and savory... (Wilson, 1943, p. 116).

Daniello's talk on tree-grafting is not so specific and neatly turned as Polixenes, but it shows how examples are drawn from arboriculture, as from other fields were associated with Renaissance discussions of "art" and 'nature' well before Shakespeare's time. In English literary treatises of the Renaissance the commonplaces of ancient and modern continental critics concerning "art" and "nature" regularly recur. Among these, the idea that 'nature' generates and regulates "art" is implied in Sidney's remark about the courtly amateur among poets who, ignorant of the prescriptions of the

learned on poetics and merely “following that which by practise hee findeth fittest to nature, therein (though he know it not) doth according to Art though not by art.” (Pincombe, 2016, p. 173) The idea that “Nature ... is above all Arte” Shakespeare could have found in Samuel Daniel’s *Defence of Ryme* (1998), had he needed to. More interesting, however, is the conjecture that Shakespeare’s remarks about “nature” and “art” in *The Winter’s Tale* may have had some relation to the elaborate discussion of these concepts in the *Arte of English Poesie* (Puttenham, 1589). The author of this treatise, most probably identified by the latest editors as George Puttenham, is distinguished among Renaissance critics for his semantic interests and his nice discriminations in the use of words. Throughout his treatise, he delights in particularizing fine distinctions of critical terminology; and he reserves for his last chapter discourse on current uses of the terms "nature" and "art" and the illustration of their exact employment in criticism. It is precisely such ‘arte’ against which Perdita objects and which Polixenes so neatly justifies by pointing out the master generalization that Puttenham’s discussion had overlooked. Puttenham’s treatise enjoyed a high reputation, in fashionable literary circles especially, during Shakespeare’s later years, and beyond; and the solemn didacticism of its author’s concluding chapter may have drawn Shakespeare’s amused attention. It would be in keeping with the quality of Shakespeare’s wit to play lightly upon Puttenham’s theme and provide a summary comment upon it, delivered with the grave urbanity of a Polixenes, a comment which should supply its primary deficiency in philosophical insight.

Puttenham’s principal aim in his discussion of "nature" and "art" was to distinguish the bases for a description of the poet’s activity and art, to analyze rather than to generalize; and this aim he fulfilled very well. Nor would Shakespeare’s comment have seemed to any thoughtful and educated contemporary, including Puttenham himself, unfamiliar. But it represents, perhaps, as well as any passage can, the supreme power of Shakespeare to see the main issue and to comment upon it with supreme felicity. Whether or not the conjectured link with Puttenham’s treatise be acceptable, it may be concluded that Shakespeare’s thought was commonplace both in antiquity and in the Renaissance and that even the horticultural illustrations Shakespeare uses were familiar in Renaissance discussions of "nature" and "art" long before Shakespeare’s time. Shakespeare’s originality is not in his

matter but in his art, which, as Dryden and Doctor Johnson long ago observed, is the "art" of "nature" itself.

The youthful lovers Florizel and Perdita are surrounded by flowers and springtime, and in the winter of his life, the aging Leontes is penitent. Winter is associated with repentance by Paulina, in a speech whose calculated rhetoric is proved hyperbolic by the outcome of the play:

A thousand knees
 Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
 Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
 In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
 To look that way thou wert.
 (Shakespeare, 1610, III, ii, 1447-1451)

The winter scene Paulina invokes helps to shock Leontes into the proper repentant state of mind to receive his wronged wife again. Polixenes, like Leontes, is of the winter generation; and only because Autolycus “does well against his own will” does Polixenes escape having something to repent. His situation is presented with delicate and delicious irony in the flower-giving episode at the sheep-shearing. He and Camillo enter disguised in white beards (Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv), like old men who might well make their reckoning with heaven. Their hostess Perdita, who has been called Flora by her lover, greets them with bouquets. With an unconscious aptness equaled by the madwomen Ophelia and Webster's Cornelia, she offers the reverend gentlemen flowers of remembrance and repentance:

Reverend sirs,
 For you there's rosemary and rue – these keep
 Seeming and savour all the winter long:
 Grace and remembrance be to you both,
 And welcome to our shearing!
 (Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 1942-1946)

Quite unknown to Perdita, who gives in accord with outward appearances, these flowers suit precisely the moral situations of the recipients. Polixenes would do well to repent in advance of his plans to sever the lovers (suggested, implicit rather than explicit, in Shakespeare, 1610, IV, ii), and remembrance of his former idyllic relations with Leontes (those days when “*We were as twinned lambs, that did frisk i'th' sun*” and “*knew not / The doctrine of ill-doing*”) would prepare well for the marriage

which will unite the two kingdoms and join country and court in full harmony. Or the flower gifts could be taken another way: that Polixenes needs the grace to repent of what he is about to do and Camillo should remember his homeland where Perdita and Polixenes must return after sixteen years to heal all rifts. However, she distributes the flowers – some of each to both characters, or rue to Polixenes and rosemary to Camillo – Perdita unknowingly offers wise admonitions (Tatspaugh, 2002, p. 25).

At this point, there is a slight puzzle in the text. Polixenes seems to accept the flowers, with a compliment: "*Shepherdess, / (A fair one are you!) well you fit our ages / With flowers of winter.*" But in reply, Perdita explains why she has no autumn flowers for her elderly guests (because those flowers, "nature's bastards," smack of artifice) and finally gives them flowers of midsummer, the prime of life. Perhaps she feels uneasy that as hostess she ought to flatter her guests by presenting them flowers suited to younger men, or possibly she volunteers her opinion of "nature's bastards" in merely passing and then tries to mollify Polixenes by a new gift of flowers. Whatever her motives, she at first offers flowers representing highly pertinent virtues and then evidently replaces these with a more charming gift.

No further comment is needed on the argument over "*marrying a gentler scion to the wildest stock,*" which has been well discussed by Wilson Knight and by Harold S. Wilson. Polixenes' arguing a position which ironically should undermine his opposition to the "grafting" of Florizel and Perdita is of a piece with his accepting the flowers of grace and remembrance which also ought to affect his actions. Perdita's opposition to the autumn flowers is understandable; these "carnations and streaked gillyflowers" are associated with eroticism as well as artifice. The flowers which Perdita finally gives the visitors are somewhat better, but there may still be a tinge of criticism implicit in her gift. Although lavender, as the Variorum states, is a flower of true love, the adjective "hot" is suspicious. Again, the heliotrope (marigold), conventionally praised by moralists for following the sun of virtue, here comes to grief and rises weeping. Love flowers are appropriate to midsummer, the height of man's powers; yet Perdita doubtless feels she is flattering her guests, and the connotations of her flattery make it dubious as praise.

Further criticism may be implied when Camillo compliments her in courtly style:

I should leave grazing, were I of your flock,
And only live by gazing.
She replies, half sportively,
Out, alas!
You'd be so lean, that blasts of January
Would blow you through and through.
(Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 1986-1990)

The joke has its grave implications. The Kalender of Sheparden tells us, January is the final month of old age. Perdita may well think this white-bearded man is stepping out of place in presuming to be a lover (note that all he can do is gazing); he will be unprepared for death because he has not accepted the facts of aging. It would have been better had he received the flowers of repentance and remembrance suitable to his age. Like Prospero, who abjures his magic and meditates on death, he ought to recognize the human limitations symbolized by mortality and prepare by penitence to die in a state of grace (MacFaul, 2015, p. 35).

For the audience, who know the actual age, identity, and intentions of Polixenes and Camillo, these conclusions also hold true, but in a different sense. Although not as aged as they appear to be in their disguises, the king and his counselor are of that "winter" generation which must undergo privation and repentance in order to correct past wrongs through the greater happiness of their offspring; even now (though unknown to the audience as yet) Leontes is submitting to penance and Hermione is hiding until the most propitious moment to reveal herself. It is known that what Polixenes intends to do would spoil the reconciliation of the two kingdoms and that he must undergo a change of heart if the springtime is to be a fair one. Leontes had arrogated a superhuman position to himself in prejudging Hermione (and exposing Perdita to the wilds of Bohemia) before the word had come from the oracle, and had even blasphemed by declaring the oracle "mere falsehood"; now Polixenes is about to pass an equally rash and incorrect judgment on a woman. He recognizes the signs of innate nobility in her – as he says,

This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the green-sward: nothing she does or seems

But smacks of something greater than herself,
 Too noble for this place
 (Shakespeare, 1610, IV, iv, 2040-2043)

– But he assumes despite the evidence of his senses that Perdita is low-born just as Leontes had imagined from a misinterpretation of what he had heard and seen that Hermione was unfaithful. Both kings need more humility and less suspicion, more remembrance of the primal human state of innocence from which they have fallen and a clearer understanding of the state of grace. Perdita's first gifts were the truest to the role Polixenes ought to play; midsummer flowers falsify the situation.

Having finally given acceptable flowers to Polixenes and Camillo, Perdita turns to Florizel and her attendant shepherdesses. She wishes for the flowers Proserpina let fall when carried off by Dis, and the plants she names – daffodils, violets, primroses, oxlips, crowns imperial lilies, and flowers-de-luce – are partly duplicated in the list Claudianus gives of flowers picked by Proserpina and her maids. The first English translator of Claudianus, Leonard Digges, offers a very pretty moralization of the Proserpina myth which applies nicely to Shakespeare's play: "*By Iupiters decree to giue Proserpine for wife to Pluto, is shewne the Diuine Prouidence, that disposeth better of things for vs, then we our selues can wish.*" (John Hopkins University Press, 2003). Although dating problems make it unlikely that Shakespeare read Digges's work before writing the play, there is some biographical connection between the two men; at any rate, Shakespeare has interpreted the myth in Digges's spirit. The flowers of early spring which Proserpina dropped can be taken as an unconscious promise of her return just as the progression in this flower-giving scene from winter to spring (in reverse chronology, as if this was a rejuvenation rather than succession from one generation to the next) offers hope of final reconciliation in the play (Tatspaugh, 2002, p. 74).

The garlands Perdita also desires partly resemble the scene of Titania's slumber, as described by Oberon:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
 Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
 Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
 With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
 There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,

Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight.
(Shakespeare, 1595, II, I, 628-633)

But Titania's love-dreams in this idyllic setting are to be misdirected by the magic herb "love-in-idleness"; natural herbs give way to the artful employment of magic.

The two plays more closely resemble each other in their treatment of love and the seasons. Titania is a biased witness, but there may be truth in her claim that the diseased nature of Oberon's love – his jealousy – causes a corresponding disease in the seasons:

And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which:
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are their parents and original.
(Shakespeare, 1595, II, I, 475-486)

Titania is no Hermione, above reproach; but it can be seen that she is at least partly right when the quarrel among the fairies over love accidentally causes distempers of love among mortals. Her parallel between distempers of love and distempers of the seasons may be therefore trusted and applied to the next play. In this view, the season of inclement weather, winter, corresponds in *The Winter's Tale* to unhealthy love: Leontes' jealousy.

Of the flowers named by Perdita, three have favorable connotations (according to Jacques Bellot): the violet is "Service," the primrose signifies "I beginne to loue you," and the lily of any color is interpreted as "The shape of good, and constant Loue." But Perdita has forebodings: she reminds the reader that Proserpina was frightened (though it is known that all ended well, just as it will in this play despite Perdita's fright), and compares the early death of the primrose with the difficulties of maids in love. Her gloominess is challenged by Florizel's robust exclamation "What,

like a corpse?" She replies, not too confidently, that even if he is to be like a corpse, it is "not to be buried, / But quick, and in mine arms." But the flowers and garments, and the role she is playing, "change her disposition"; she partly stifles her doubts, and she plays her role so nobly that, as Florizel's next speech indicates, she is already transformed into the queen she is by nature and birth.

VI. Conclusion

The idea of nature is a guideline for Shakespeare as nature is one of his favourite key words and concepts. From the concept of nature, the playwright not only draws arguments for his most significant thoughts; nature is the norm and measure for him in assessing the dignity of all human actions. Separate properties of nature found a peculiar reflection in Shakespeare's work. It is the creative process of nature that underlies the Shakespearean idea of movement, development, the variability of life – an approach that finds expression in the dynamism of its images and the depiction of characters.

One of the most critical properties of nature for Shakespeare is its "beauty," something that is perfectly transmitted by the favourite Shakespeare's word "fine" (beautiful, noble, pure, bright), as opposed to foul (harmful, nasty, dirty, dark). Nature for Shakespeare is a healthy, beautiful, creative life, – it is a development. One of the beauties of poetry is vivid imagery. The basis of the symbolic system of poetry is metamorphic. Every thought, event, the experience shall be expressed through comparison, likening of one subject to another. Shakespeare had no limits in creating new comparisons and metaphors. Many of them belong to the grand poetic style, while others surprise the readers and the audiences with their prosaism and "meanness." The examples have been cited meet the requirements of high fashion. Even these examples, now perceived as somewhat vivid, were relatively modest for the era of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's plays reflect early modern awareness that relations between human and non-human life and their physical environments were changing. Their direct contextual representation of new threats such as climate change, population growth, deforestation, biologically degrading cultivation practices, and gunpowder militarization clarified the presence of

real but sometimes distant, unprecedented, unfamiliar and complex disturbances to daily lives. Shakespeare's vivid perceptions of micro- and macro-networks of organic growth also invited audiences to compare local or regional English environments with the period's empirically expanding boundaries of global nature. By registering these multiscaled conditions of dwelling and natural history, Shakespeare anticipated today's similarly fluid state of ecological knowledge and its leading paradigm of interdependence. His plays also construct imaginative bridges between post-Darwinian ontologies and post-humanist ethics by reflecting pre-Cartesian ideas about the shared mental and physical capacities of human and non-human animals.

Because Shakespeare wrote professionally as a playwright and poet, rather than as a natural historian, he wove his age's nascent understanding of ecology as both science and environmental politics into the metaphoric textures and situational dynamics of his dialogue, often under the veil of humor and irony. His creative approach to early modern ecologies licenses critical practices that extend the limits of his period's geophysical knowledge, and that suggests productive analogies with our ecological challenges. Recent ecocritics have been seizing such opportunities to help people rethink environmentally destructive economic and social paradigms.

Shakespeare's most significant possibilities for becoming the eco-contemporary, however, arguably lie not in academic discourse but performance. Part of this potential comes from Shakespeare's extraordinary global reach and seemingly inexhaustible capacity for reinvention, whether in local shows, regional and worldwide tours, or generating digital platforms. In theatre productions specifically, but perhaps other mediums as well, audiences see and feel a physical space shaping the human interactions of players, characters, and spectators – in-the-moment relations which Shakespeare often asks the audience/the reader to notice within his dramatic narratives. These spatial and kinetic feedbacks implicitly convey an environmentalist ethos: that real or imagined environments are not decorative or utilitarian backdrops for human-centered relations, but have independent agency and determining energies of their own. Further, because Shakespeare in modern performance continues to appeal to a wide range of hearts and minds, his plays wield effective and imaginative power for shifting personal convictions and behaviors in ways that pioneering

ecologists such as Aldo Leopold recognized were essential for stirring up environmental complacency and motivating progressive action.

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