

Human-Nature Bond: A Study on Shakespeare's Selected Sonnets

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Abstract

Shakespeare's sonnets are free from monolithic knowledge credited to God. The paper critically acknowledges the complex relationship between humans and nature since ages particularly in Shakespeare's selected sonnets, highlighting ecological values in the context of real-world challenges such as deforestation, pollution, and resource exploitation. Within the framework of his sonnet, the paper focuses on ecology and its impact on contemporary Europe. The paper draws on the views of writers spanning from Romanticism to the latest perspectives on ecocriticism and climate justice. It observes through the lens of ecocritical readings of Shakespeare. The sonnets are solid proofs of ecological consciousness. The paper wraps up on how human actions have a direct impact on environmental stability, highlighting the interconnectedness of social, economic, and ecological systems. He draws a metaphor from Nature to demonstrate that Nature is superior to human beings. At the same time, he expresses his most profound love to his beloved.

Keywords: Ecology, human-nature bond, Shakespeare, sonnet,

Introduction

Sonnet is "a lyric poem comprising fourteen rhyming lines of equal length: iambic pentameters in English" (Baldick, 2004), originating in Italy. Petrarch was the most renowned Italian sonneteer of that time. The sonnet was introduced to England by Henry Howard and Thomas Wyatt in the early 16th century. By the end of the 16th century, the sonnet had become the most popular genre of poetry in Britain, and it was in full flourish through the artistic endeavours of some eminent poets such as Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, and so forth. (Baldick). William Shakespeare wrote 13 Comedies, 13 Historical Plays, 6 Tragedies, 4 Tragicomedies, as well as many sonnets (154), which were primarily dedicated to his patron. Shakespeare's sonnets reach a summit in their thematic profundity, as well as in form and emotion. The paper attempts to explore the thematic uniqueness of Shakespeare's sonnets within broader themes, such as Nature, environment, rivers, seas, and the interconnectedness of Nature with human beings. It also fosters a keen interest in the treatment of environmental assets in fulfilling human needs within a Renaissance context.

Shakespeare's sonnets are free from monolithic knowledge of God. His creations are entirely detached from the rigid patterns of medieval mythology. Greenblatt at this stand clarifies that "free, a word that with its variants Shakespeare uses hundreds of times, means in his work the opposite of confined, imprisoned, subjected, constrained, and afraid to speak out [. . .] are unimpeded and untrammelled, generous and magnanimous, frank and open-minded (Shakespeare's Freedom, 16). Thinkers in modern times deny any correlation between Shakespeare's influence on religion. He was concerned about humans and their surroundings. Therefore, it concludes that "almost the only lasting human concern that Shakespeare can be said to have not affected is religion". He was above all popular prejudices, therefore best described to himself as "a heretical transcendentalist" (Peter 7).

In a thematic Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets, men should conquer time through offspring, poetry, and steadfast love to procure eternal beauty and life, thus reflecting Shakespeare's humanistic consciousness and philosophical thoughts. English experimenters during the Renaissance developed a stanza form known as the English sonnet, also referred to as the Shakespearean sonnet. The Shakespearean form has been the most popular among English poets, adapted for various purposes, including 'serious and frivolous' uses, often characterized by introspection, brooding, and enigmatic themes, and frequently addressed to a beautiful young man known as 'Shakespearean form' (57), in Elements in Literature. Abrahms reassures that the sonnet is a lyric form consisting of fourteen iambic pentameter lines linked by an intricate rhyme scheme.

The paper examines four of Shakespeare's selected sonnets from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on the treatment of the environment from modern ecocritical viewpoints. The selected sonnets are: 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', 'A Woman face is nature's hand Painted', 'Like as the Waves Make towards the Pebbl'd Shore' 'That time of year thou mayst in me behold'.

The Renaissance period marked a shift in representation from God to Nature, with a significant shift in understanding of the environment. Nature is regarded as the source of creative inspiration and a subject of scientific experimentation. The art, literature, and philosophical thought endorsed humanity's relationship with Nature. During the Renaissance, the prevalent themes of English sonnets were friendship and love. Shakespeare not only inherits this tradition but also presents it through his experimental sonnet structure. Shakespeare exquisitely describes his internal world and deeply expresses his unique feelings about the external world. Presenting profound philosophical thoughts in plain language, aiming to convey an impressive social meaning with alluring characterization, are key factors that make his sonnets an immortal classic. Renaissance was profoundly shaping the modern view of the cosmos and Nature [. . .] the global explorations made possible by the magnetic compass greatly impelled intellectual innovation, reflecting and encouraging the new scientific investigation of the natural world and further affirming the West's sense of being at the heroic frontier of civilized history (Tarnas, 260).

This study enhances our understanding of the interaction between humans and Nature, as well as the crucial role that environmental consciousness plays in shaping a sustainable future. It also makes an effort to investigate Renaissance literature's awareness of Nature and the environment, as well as how these themes are portrayed in literary works. It further presents a critical view of Shakespeare's representation of Nature, human interaction with the environment, and the idealization of rural life. It overlooks the impact of human actions, both in harmony and discord between humans and their surroundings, in his selected sonnets, as academics investigate the interactions between literary texts and Nature, as well as human-nature relationships. The ecological overview of Shakespeare's sonnets

reveals deeper ties to the natural world, even though the poems are frequently studied for their themes of love, time, and mortality. Furthermore, the study redraws the sonnets through seasonal cycles, anthropocentrism, and environmental imageries.

Literature Review

The study will comprise a close reading of the primary text. For this purpose, environmental theorists have proposed ideas to develop theoretical tools for analysis, focusing on a humanistic approach. The approach primarily explores the relationship between distinct environmental stimuli and human response. Ecocriticism, explores the intersection of literature and the environment, examines how literary texts engage with Nature, ecology, and human-nature relationships. Besides Shakespeare's popular themes such as love, time, and mortality, the paper foregrounds ecological survey reveals deeper connections between Nature and human beings. The review synthesizes existing publications on ecocritical interpretations of Shakespeare's sonnets, generally highlighting key thematic concerns such as seasonal cycles, anthropocentrism, and environmental imagery.

Historically, Agriculture brought significant social development, causing additional strain on the natural ecosystem. They required space for the field, construction materials for houses, and fuel for cooking and heating, which inevitably led to greater deforestation (Pakenham, 196). He further writes that studies have shown that population growth has been primarily responsible to threat the environment at local, national, and global levels. It indeed indicates unsustainable economic development, which later shifted to industrialization. Political extremism later led to colonization, which in turn became a significant contributor to environmental injustice.

Renaissance Humanism sparked a renewed interest in Nature and its observation. The interest combinedly focused on Nature's practical uses as well as its inherent beauty and the human competency to understand it. Dewitt further writes in Greek Humanism that humanists saw Nature as a subject worthy of artistic representation and a more realistic depiction of the natural world in art. In that spirit, Renaissance humanism is present in most of Shakespeare's literary works, most notably in Hamlet. (268) Shakespeare's humanistic thought not only brought vitality and luster to the Renaissance but also inspired the flow of humanity, making progress in human history. Neema Parvini, entitled Shakespeare's Historical and Political Thought in Context, demonstrates it is individuals, not God, who drive history (110). For environmentalists, sustainability is an amalgamation of cultural, aesthetic, and natural elements, fostering a deeper connection to Nature, aiming to create an ecological balance. The study adopts a collaborative approach to tackle global environmental issues, reflecting the need for reliable relationship between human civilization and the Natural world. Writers developed their "ecological consciousness from three aspects: natural aesthetic and spiritual significance, simple ecological environmental protection consciousness, and community life" (Jin, 2022). They reveal the true meaning of beauty in Nature, interpreting the beauty of harmony in harmony with Nature, and advocate for a return to Nature and the beauty of human beings. Jin further opens up a natural path leading to truth, goodness, and beauty, allowing people to pursue their spiritual home. Expressing their deep concern for natural resources and the natural environment by calling on people to respect life and protect and rationally utilize natural resources. It highlights that people are not the masters of Nature, but rather inseparable members of it, forming an equal community with other species on the globe. The rationale of British and American romantic literature lies in revealing the profound relationship and mutual influence between human beings and Nature, prompting us to comprehend the protection of the ecology and living in harmony with it.

The early intellectual underpinnings of ecocriticism were laid by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors such as R.W. Emerson, H.D. Thoreau, and W. Wordsworth, who highlighted the interdependence of humans and Nature. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) marks the entry of the ecocritical issue in literature, specifically the harmful impact of excessive pesticide use in farming on both human and natural environments. Her text joined science, literature, and activism. Along with her text, the twentieth century witnessed growing awareness of environmental consciousness. The same period also witnessed the introduction of feminist and philosophical perspectives on ecocriticism. William Rueckert first coined the term ecocriticism in *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. There are two waves of ecocriticism as identified by Lawrence Buell. "The first wave (1980s-1990s) eco-critics focused on nature writing, nature poetry, and wilderness fiction. Here, the environment effectively means the natural environment" (168). The second wave of ecocriticism (2000s) expanded to include "urban ecologies, postcolonial perspectives, and environmental justice". The second wave eco-critics are inclined towards environmental justice issues and a "social ecocriticism" that takes urban landscape as seriously as "natural landscape" (Buell qtd. in Mishra 168). This wave also engaged with postmodernism, ecofeminism, and animal studies. Contemporary ecocriticism includes global, intersectional, and interdisciplinary approaches. It also addresses climate change, Anthropocene discourse, and nonhuman agency. In the essay entitled *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, "the author focuses on "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature". Buell defines ecocriticism as "a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (430). His definition of ecocriticism involves interdisciplinary approaches to analyzing the environment as represented in literary works. Cherryl Glotfelty (2022) defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". In the same volume, Scott Slovic (2015) defines ecocriticism as the definition provided by Glotfelty emphasizes the larger environmental context of literature and other forms of human expression. According to Slovic, ecocriticism is a versatile and open field that can easily blend various critical approaches to uncover the ecological significance of all forms of human expression, from high to popular culture.

Research Methodology

Since William Shakespeare's selected poems are the subject of this paper, it collects, analyses, and interprets data following the fundamentals of qualitative research. This study gathers information about environmental criticism in light of recent trends, in accordance with the interpretive research paradigm. A thorough analysis of pertinent literature was conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues concerning natural resource distribution, climate justice and ecocriticism. A variety of academic databases, such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate, along with additional pertinent sources, including books, journals, and articles, were used to conduct the literature review. The researchers analyzed the book; no participants were included in the study. Due to the qualitative approach underlying the research design, themes pertaining to the research questions, such as ecocritical studies, climate justice, and ecological awareness. In addition, academics from the field of nature study and environmental justice are consulted for a comprehensive review of the text. The goals of the study were achieved through the use of a qualitative research approach. A comprehensive thematic analysis of the text acquired the data. The paper examines the novel's present presumptions regarding nature consciousness. It also reveals how the Nature is represented in his selected sonnets. In light of pertinent literature, the study findings are examined and analyzed, and conclusions are reached as a result of the analysis. The study emphasizes the value of identifying ecological identities and the strategies to treat Nature and its influence in contemporary times. It examines critically the human-

Nature bond in the time of Shakespeare. It equally shed light on the ecological consciousness of the contemporary time.

Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Ecocritical Redraw

Shakespeare's initial comparison of the beloved to a "summer's day" (1), which is "too short" (4), and can be "too hot" (5). The "fair" things may decline by "chance or nature's changing course" (7-8). The expressions are mixed with the early modern anxiety about environmental complexities. Human knowledge was a process of knowing Nature. This depiction aligns with early modern anxieties about environmental instability (Watson 45). It allows us to reinterpret the sonnet's portrayal of summer as fragile and mutable, which is beyond human control. Humans need to adjust to it. The speaker resolves Nature's transience by immortalizing the beloved in verse:

"So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (13-14).

Here, poetry functions as an ecological counterweight, where nature decays and changes, whereas art endures and remains unchanged. Sonnet 18 appears to celebrate love on the lap of Nature. It reveals a more profound meditation on Nature's ephemerality and poetry's preservative power. By comparing the speedy summer and the eternal love in timeless written words, Shakespeare anticipates modern ecological concerns about fragility and preservation. In Sonnet 20, 'A woman's face, with Nature's hand painted (1)' can be interpreted as a poetic way of describing the beauty of a person, suggesting that Nature itself is the artist responsible for their features. This highlights the connection between humanity and the natural world, implying that human beauty is a reflection of Nature's artistry. It invites consideration as an early modern literary work that reflects, romanticizes, or challenges human relationships with the natural world. Nature and imagination are the supreme entities in literature. The sonnet describes his fair youth. The opening line of the title compares the woman's face (possibly that of his friend) to a creation of Nature, which is perfect in all its dimensions. Hence, he claims that it is the perfect creation that can meet his 'passion'. He finds delicacy as well as the controlling power, both in the face. It means that Nature creates a balance in human psychology, just as it does on Earth. It indicates the balance of the ecosystem and the role of each flora and fauna in the world in maintaining their well-being and preserving the rest of the species in a harmonious order. The compound word 'master-mistress' (Line 8) indicates that Nature is a master of this perfect creation, and on the other hand, Nature, you are love (mistress). Nothing is perfect than you. He praises the sight of the woman as a golden gaze, similar to the golden dusk on the beach, inviting and engaging. He finds the man is his own 'hue' with 'his controlling'. The varieties of natural colors are embedded in a human being, which transforms the world according to their controlling way. The eighth and ninth line - "And for a woman first thou created went thou first created" / Till Nature as she wrought thee fail a-doting"- praises Nature for the careful and decorative way of creation, which is attractive and alluring to all.

A Woman's Face, with Nature's Own Hand Painted

Hast thou the master mistress of my passion. (Line, 1-2)

He finds the creation to be 'doting' — a lavish display of attention and fondness. In the couplet of the sonnet, he again praises a woman's pleasure, not aiming to consume her physically, but rather to feel it

on a higher physiological level and praise it ever. It reflects a higher sense of devotion and love between Nature and humanity in the Renaissance. The massive devastation of Nature, especially the forest, was a tragedy of human loss in the environment, alongside the rise of human discoveries and technologies. The sonnet is indicating the wise use of Nature, not to destroy it. He is attracted to the woman but does not dare to consume her; he gives a strong sense of nature conservation and sustainability. Nature is often framed in terms of human aesthetics, which is entirely based on human knowledge, and this perspective is anthropocentric, where Nature's value is measured and aligned with human ideals. This reflects the present tension in ecological thinking: admiration vs. control. The beauty is described in human terms, modelled on a woman's face, and yet made by Nature. The blend of human and natural imagery shows human forms to idealize the natural world. The sonnet's opening quatrain parallels the oceanic movement and human life:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,

So do our minutes hasten to their end;

Each changing place with that which goes before,

In sequence, all forwards do contend. (1-4)

The waves at the same time combine both natural continuity and inevitable decay. The 'pebbled shore' suggests decay and erosion, a geological process that is equal to the fleeting time of humans. As Dan Brayton (2018) notes, "Shakespeare's seascapes often serve as metaphors for temporal and spatial instability" (78). The sonnet's imagery, therefore, aligns human temporality with ecological processes. It is a great philosophy and the deepest learning of human beings. The second quatrain refers to agricultural imagery and violent natural forces:

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,

And delves the parallels in beauty's brow. (9-10)

'Delves the parallels' vs. 'transfix the flourish' suggests both a cultivator and a destroyer. Shakespeare underscores Nature's dual role in sustaining and erasing life. Sonnet 60's ecological imagery ('waves, erosion, cyclical destruction') reveals Shakespeare's awareness of Nature's power over human life. Using an ecocritical lens, we reveal that early modern environmental participation resonates with current concerns about temporariness and climate change. Hence, the sonnet serves as an anthropomorphic view positioned at the centre of the natural world, and also on mortality.

Likewise, William Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, "That time of year thou mayst in me behold," suggests theme of ageing/ mortality through the natural imagery. The sonnet employs three key natural metaphors—autumn, twilight, and a dying fire—that define the speaker's ageing. The first quatrain describes "yellow leaves, or none, or few" (2), evoking the barrenness and pessimism of late autumn, which is going to fleet soon, reflecting the decay and decline. The speakers align human ageing with seasonal change, inviting a universal truth that the inevitability of decay exists in both Nature and human life. As Bate argues, "Shakespeare's sonnets frequently blur the boundary between the human subject and the natural world, suggesting an ecological consciousness" (Bate 112). The speaker realizes that the human experience is part of a universal cycle. The second quatrain shifts to twilight:

the twilight of such day

As after sunset fades in the west (5-6).

This couplet emphasizes how the fleeting life links the daily loss of light to the slow extinction of life. According to the relationship, human time is cyclical rather than linear, reflecting the rhythms of Nature. The sonnet situates humanity within the broader chronological context of Nature. The speaker's acknowledgement of his impending death, as in "This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more-strong" (13), prompts human beings to recognize their place in Nature's cycles. Morton's concept of "dark ecology" is relevant here, as it "embraces decay and interconnectedness as fundamental to ecological thought" (73). After adopting natural imagery, Sonnet 73 portrays ageing as a part of a familiar ecological narrative, fills up the distinction between environmental and human degradation. His sonnets anticipate the rise of ecocritical issues by illustrating the intricate relationship between human existence and environmental cycles. The sonnet prompts readers to reconsider the boundaries between the human and animal realms. His comparison finds that Nature is superior to human beings. Here, we can see the mystery of human beings to Nature. In the early modern period, the space of God in the sphere of knowledge was gradually occupied by the exploration of Nature, which has largely impacted the formation of knowledge and human behavior. Nature, now, was not only a matter of celebration but also a source of knowledge and exploration. In the title 'Shall I Compare Thee to Summers Day?', he is debating whether or not his loved one is worth being compared to summer's day. It suggests that the poet assumes That Nature is superior to human beings. He is indicating the great things of Nature and the faults of man.

The proximal relationship between Nature and human culture makes both entities remain interactive consistently. His sonnets are solid proofs of eco-awareness. Human roles are either 'ecocidal or eco-affable' as coined by Rueckert (2006) in his seminal work *Metaphor and Reality: A Meditation on Man, Nature and Words*. Nature has brightness and joy, which are essential elements that blossom and revive over time, making possible improvement and delighted restoration.

Conclusion

Shakespeare frequently compares the beloved to natural elements, elevating their beauty by acknowledging Nature as a standard of perfection. His writing shifts from God's knowledge to human knowledge. His anthropomorphic view not only praises Nature as a guide but also imbues the strains of Nature with mystery. He recognizes the profound interconnection between Nature and humanity. His creative works allocate an ample space for Nature, its changes, and its influence on human society. The cyclical decay and renewal of Nature symbolize aging and mortality. He compares morally restrained people to a 'summer's flower' that thrives without harming others. He realizes stars, sun, and oceans are related to constancy or vastness. All in all, for Shakespeare, Nature is a celebration of beauty.

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