

A Holistic View of Life in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

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As You Like It is one of the seventeen comedies written by William Shakespeare. The play is both a solemnization of the spirit of the pastoral romance and the satire of the pastoral ideal. The play finds its origin in the pastoral tradition of the Renaissance in which the country field and forest provides a sanctuary from urban or courtly issues. The play itself takes place in a forest where the characters are hiding from disloyalty at court or injustice in the family. The pastoral tradition began with Theocritus in ancient Greece, whose writings explored the sorrows of love and daily injustices in a rural setting. Virgil expanded the tradition, emphasizing the distinction between urban and rural lifestyles even more. Renaissance literature focused more on the distinction between court and country life.

The pastoral tradition, in spite of taking many literary forms, conformed to a traditional set of rules. A typical story would involve exiles from the court or city going into the countryside and living either with or as shepherds. While in the rural area, they would hold singing contests and philosophically discuss the various merits of both forms of life. Eventually the exiles would return to the city having resolved their particular problems. Pastoral works have most frequently been used as social criticisms due to their ability to question the natural world versus the artificial manmade world. The characters often discuss whether life in the country is preferable to that of the city, usually focusing on such evils as cruel mistresses or the dishonesty of courtiers for themes. The simplicity of the countryside is always celebrated in a highly artful manner, imitating the Western literary tradition as it has developed over time. Indeed, the pastoral genre provides authors with a way to pretend; the characters immerse themselves in another world and can act out their ideal worlds. Thus in this "simplistic world" we see many disguises where courtiers pretend to be shepherds, men dress as women, women dress as men, and nobles become outlaws. The pastoral world gives its cast an opportunity to alter their own world when they return through the games they play in this contrived, imaginary location.

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* perfectly gives the holistic view of life by seeing everything in wholeness. Romance, human relationships, humanity, love, politics, and transformation of characters, divinity, disguise, rural and rustic life, effects of relationship between humans and Nature is widely seen. The play is all about the transformation of the characters by the contact with Nature. The Forest of Arden plays a significant role in the play and acts itself as a character. The play shows the pleasures of rustic life and rejects the court life.

In this 21st century, people are losing their harmony with Nature. The history of our civilization can be written as the history of our idea of Nature and attitude towards Nature. Nature exists for man's exploitation and profit. It has therefore gone hand in glove with materialism and industrialism. The whole drive of our civilization has been based on the

assumption that civilization itself is an alternative to nature and superior to it, that mind and technology offer us an alternative method of shaping the world, as though humanity were autonomous. It takes a huge effort now to apprehend interrelationships, continuities and wholes, to see the whole of Nature as a tree on which humanity is a leaf.

In the Elizabethan Age, people were so much involved in the courtly matters. They didn't know the feeling of being in contact with Nature. In the Romantic era, William Wordsworth writes in *The World Is Too Much With Us*,

**"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!"**

Nature purifies and moralizes humans. It fills their mind with sublime thoughts, and acts as his guide teacher. The characters that live in court in *As You Like It* have unhappy lives as their lives are full with plotting and schemes against each other, but when they are united with the natural world, they get a sense of moral values and got delighted.

As You Like It explores Shakespeare's understanding of the holistic view of life, seeing all the things with wholeness. The company of Nature gives joy to the human heart and exercises a healing effect. There is a divine spirit in all the objects of Nature. The Elizabethan courtly people turned away from a communion with Nature. The separation of man from the beauties of Nature is a curse for his own mental development. Materialism takes man away from the path of Nature. Close contact with Nature brings consolation and peace to his soul. *As You Like It* also shows that people are too involved in worldly things and have lost their connection with Nature, which also leads to the loss of moral values, but at the end, they all are transferred being in touch with the green world.

There is a general spoiling of ethics and values due to global individualization. To protect ourselves from alienation, we need to be caring society in which a humanitarian spirit prevails over excessively materialistic values. We need to revive our spiritual, environmentally friendly culture. This will provide a harmonious society with a favourable ethical climate.

The term 'Holism' is a coinage from the word 'wholeness'. Holism indicates that the parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts. Humans are bio, psycho, social, and spiritual beings. Each aspect of functioning needs attention and care. Holistic approach means that everything is connected to everything. So everything affects everything. Everything connected as a whole that is holistic.

Holistic living transplants the mind's eye that is used for having a vision, not division. Individuals, Nature and, society react strongly. There is a three-way relationship among the individual, society and the physical world. Holistic living emphasizes on harmony among them. Each person need to fully understand, and act in such ways that indicate, that is well-being is embedded in nature and his social relations. As *You Like It* shows this relationship between man and Nature very broadly. There has been a close relationship between nature and literature. Eco-poetics is the study of representations of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment.

As *You Like It* is graceful, exquisite, sweetest, and happiest of all of Shakespeare's comedies. The play is sometimes viewed as a breath of fresh air which allowed Shakespeare free reign for his imagination between the earlier history plays and his later tragedies. The play sets out to renew our faith in love and in human nature. It conveys a longing for a renewal of innocence even if it is merely a temporary escape from the corrupt world back into nature, back into wholeness, back to the Garden of Eden, or rather, the Forest of Arden.

The Forest of Arden is an imaginary place where love and charity find sanctuary, even if contradictions are ever-present to remind us that the forest is not Eden. Duke Senior and his followers live in amity. The Duke addresses his companions in their first appearance onstage as follows:

***"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,
The seasons' difference."***

The Duke invites his followers to think of him as a fellow-exile and brother; rank and social distinctions have been left behind to a significant degree, even though they all respect the Duke as their leader. Duke finds the forest a safer place to live in than the court. Charles the wrestler tells Oliver how Duke and his followers live ***"in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England . . . and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world."*** (1.1.95-114).

Duke states in his speech that, ***"Sweet are the uses of adversity."*** (2.1.12) Duke means that there is something good in adversity which is like a toad; for a toad, though ugly and poisonous carries a precious jewel on his head. The uses of misfortune are good. Though humans hate suffering from miseries, but the uses of those sufferings are sweet because it teaches to overcome the situations. Sometimes misfortune turns out to be a good fortune. Adversity almost always brings out strengths in people's characters. He furthers says,

***"Finds tongues in trees, books in the running books,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."*** (2.1.16-17)

The woodland life of Duke and his Lords is retired from public and crowded life. It finds some moral and truths in trees, and in the flowing rivers and in stones, and recognizes good in everything. Duke doesn't want to change this life forever by living in the Forest of Arden.

Amiens shows the charms of country life by singing songs. He asks people to come and join him in forest because there is no enemy in forest, one can spend peaceful life. The enemies are only rough weather and winter:

***"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And turns his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."*** (2.5.1-8)

Again Amiens, Jaques and, the Lords together sing a song describing why and who should come to the forest to live. They say that the person who has nothing to do with ambition, who loves to live an open air life, who gets his food by his own labor, and who becomes pleased with what he gets should come to the Forest of Arden. He will only find winter and rough weather as his enemies:

***"Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to live i' sun,
Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."*** (2.5.30-38)

When **Orlando** and **Adam** reach the Forest of Arden, Adam is extremely tired and hungry, unable to even walk. Orlando roams around in the forest to find food for both of them. He finds the place where Duke Senior and his Lords lived. With the hope of getting some food, he goes to them with sword in his hands and demands for food in anger. But the gentle words of Duke makes Orlando feel sorry. Duke invites him and Adam to have food along with them without any worries. Orlando gets ashamed of his violence and puts away his sword. This is something Nature has changed Duke's personality and has made him even more gentle. While having food, Orlando demands for music. Amiens sings a song showing the reality of the world. He attacks the ingratitude shown by people:

***"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;. . .
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly;. . .
Though thou the waters wrap,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remember'd not."*** (2.6.180-194)

Amiens says that winter is not as unkind as ingratitude shown by man. It does not bite so sharp as ingratitude, because it is not seen, although its chilly breath makes us shiver. Amiens asks to welcome green holly. Most love is hypocrisy, and love is nothing, but folly. Let the winter sky freeze, it is not so painful to us as the forgetting of benefits rendered. The water may freeze in frost; yet the bite of the chill is not so sharp as the indifference of friends.

As Rosalind ordered to leave the court by his uncle, Duke Fredrick, she decides to go to the Forest of Arden where her father Duke Senior lived after banishment. Celia was so much attached to her cousin, so she also decided go to the Forest of

Arden along with her. When they reach the Forest of Arden, Rosalind is physically tired, but her mind becomes more alert and lively. The real self of Rosalind comes out in the Forest of Arden. She falls in love with Orlando with serious earnest. But as she is disguised as Ganymede, and doesn't want to reveal her true identity, she continues to enjoy the fun of it. Orlando writes fantastic verses and inscribes them on the barks of the trees. It is true to the spirit of Arden.

Orlando in the beginning of the play, is a discontented young man, melancholic, bound to bear with the tyranny of his brother, and doesn't find any difference between life and death. But once he enters into the Forest of Arden, a space free from the norms of hierarchy, he asserts himself as a loyal courtier and an ardent lover. He feels free to express his passion through verses, however bad they are, engraved on the barks of the trees. Forest of Arden presents before us a renewed Orlando, who is bubbling with vitality and energy, just like his poems, an expression of inner joy.

Oliver, the elder brother of Orlando, has been painted in black in the first half of the play. Apart from his misbehaviour with his brother, he even plots to kill him by burning. Such a wicked fellow, when he enters the Forest of Arden, undergoes conversion after being rescued by his brother from the attacks of the snake and the lioness. Another character to experience such sudden change of attitude is that of Duke Frederick. In the beginning of the play, he is an usurper banishing his brother after snatching his dukedom. At the end of the play we find him retiring from the worldly life, restoring all his wealth and power upon his brother.

The reason behind these conversions is the magical power possessed by the Forest of Arden. Here, Ecopoetics offer a more reasonable interpretation. According to it, nature itself has a big influence upon all the creatures. Once you come under its soothing effect, you will find peace and rest within yourself. Such was the case of Oliver and Duke Frederick too. After the tedious ways of life in the court, when they entered into the peaceful and serene atmosphere of the forest, they realized the meaninglessness of wealth, power and lust leading nowhere but to damnation. So, they overthrew all their evil designs in order to live a new life in the lap of nature. Jaques introduces an ecocentric point of view into the text. The previous occasion shows Jaques feeling sympathy for the wounded deer. Jaques' *"weeping and commenting upon the sobbing deer."* (2.1.65-66), finally, tell us much about his melancholy: the state of his humours causes him to weep; he finds himself attracted to water; and from an ecological point of view, he sympathizes and identifies with a wounded deer. Later in another occasion we see him chiding Orlando for marring the barks of the trees by writing love-poems on them. He feels the pain of the trees while carving the letters on them.

Jaques admonishes him saying, *"I pray you mar no more trees with writing love-songs in their barks."* (3.2.237-38). Even the shepherds and shepherdesses, the original inhabitants of the forest, share some of his sympathetic feelings. This becomes prominent through the role he plays in the Touchstone-Audrey story. Touchstone's intentions towards Audrey are not thoroughly honourable. Though he marries her at the end of the play, Jaques has a suspect that Touchstone is not so much interested in a long-term commitment to the obsessively moral Audrey. Led by his doubt about the matter, initially he tries to make their marital bond stronger by solemnizing the marriage not in secret, rather in the presence of almost all the other characters of the play. Thus, in his own

way he tries to save Audrey, one of the original residents of the forest, from being exploited by the 'civilized' people as far as he could. Moreover, his banishment into the forest seems to be deliberately undertaken, not under any compulsion, unlike the other characters. He is a true lover of nature in its original essence. That's why when everything is happily settled down at the end of the play, and all other characters are returning to the court, he is the only one who refuses to leave the forest.

Jaques recognizes the inalienable right that the deer have to live in their native habitat free from the violence of mankind. His response to the deer's plight illustrates his viewpoint that all God's creatures have an equal right to existence, a way of thinking that does not distinguish between humans and other forms of nature. The displacement of the deer, the rightful citizens of the forest, offends Jaques, and seeing the deer with a fatal wound inflicted by a man profoundly affects Jaques, causing him not only to weep but also to rail against the injustices forced on nature by mankind.

*...[the deer] being there alone,
Left and abandoned of his velvet friend,
'Tis right,' quoth he, 'thus misery doth part
The flux of company.' Anon a careless herd
Full of the pasture jumps along by him
And never stays to greet him. 'Ay,' quoth Jaques,
'Sweep on you fat and greasy citizens,
'Tis just the fashion. Wherefore should you look
Upon the poor and broken bankrupt there?' (2.2.49-57)*

Jaques' feelings about human nature as well as the nature of the world colour the final scene of the play, which presents an ambiguous picture of Jaques's melancholy.

He does begin this long speech with benevolent words for Orlando and Rosalind, Oliver and Celia, and Duke Senior, but with Silvius and Touchstone, he degenerates into a vulgar parody of Hymen's speech of blessing to the soon-to-be-wed couples. Jaques leaves these couples to their merriment, confirming that he is *"for other than for dancing measures."* (5.4.192). He, thus, draws a line between himself and the love, connection, and joy symbolized by "dancing measures." Though Jaques leaves the company of others, he also plans, after spending some time in an abandoned cave in the forest, to seek out the company of Duke Frederick and his men, who will take Duke Senior's and the foresters' place in Arden. Jaques now plans on learning from others whereas before he was content to teach them their faults and the faults of human nature. A sense of humility has crept into his nature, then, and so a subtle change does appear in Jaques's nature in the end. Jaques more closely allies himself with the natural forest than the people inhabiting that forest. People come and go in the green world, but for Jaques, nature and melancholy endure. Jaques's keen awareness of man's role in nature is evidenced in his lamentations concerning the dying deer, which show an understanding of man's responsibility to the natural world.

Touchstone, the clown, a social inferior at court, acts the urbane gentleman in the He is an example of Shakespeare's Sense of irony about pastoral joys, for he plays a role of disconnected exile from the court. He says to Corin, an old shepherd, that that life of shepherds is worthless. As a solitary life, it is good; but as a private life, it is retired. Touchstone said that the open air life pleased him, but as it was removed from the court life, it was dull. He doesn't like plain and simple life. In reply, Corin views his philosophy of life:

"No more but that I know the more one sickens, the worse at ease he is; and that he that wants money, means and content is without three good friends. . . . the sun hath learned no wit by nature nor art may complain of good breeding or comes of a very dull kindred." (3.2.20-25)

Corin's philosophy of life is that, the more one is sick, the more one is uncomfortable; he who wants money, means and contentment, is without three friends; the attribute of rain is to wet and the attribute of fire is to burn; good feeding makes sheep healthy; the cause of the night is the absence of the sun; he who is lacking in sense and wisdom which are the gifts of nature, or lacks education, comes from a stupid family.

Touchstone says to Corin that if one is never at court, he never cultivates good manners, his manners becomes wicked. He believed that wickedness is sin, and sin condemns one to hell. Corin, in support of a country life, gives him an excellent answer saying:

"Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at the court. You told me you salute not at the court, but you kiss your hands; that courtesy would be uncleanly, if courtiers were shepherds." (3.2.40-44)

The rustic Corin is indeed socially inferior to a court clown. He articulates the social and personal coordinates of his own life. The country Corin knows who he is, but the court characters have to find out. Corin describes himself:

"I am a true labourer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm, and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck." (3.2.73-7)

Corin is an honest labourer. He earns what he eats, and what he wears. He hates nobody and is not jealous of any man's happiness. He is glad for the good of the other people. His greatest pride is to see his ewes graze and his lamb's suck.

Everyone has come to the Forest of Arden as it a green refuge from all other troubles and complications of court life. To them life at the court was one of slavery, of inhibitions. The Forest of Arden seems to them a symbol of liberty. So Celia says:

**"Now go we in content
To liberty and not to banishment." (1.3.132-133)**

Pastoral literature thrives on the contrast between life in the city and life in the country. Often it suggests that the oppressions of the city can be remedied by a trip into the country's therapeutic woods and fields, and that a person's sense of balance and rightness can be restored by conversations with uncorrupted shepherds and shepherdesses. This type of restoration enables one to return to the city a better person, capable of making the most of urban life.

As You Like It mainly focuses on the effects of being in communion with Nature. Above argument broadly shows how the characters are transformed when they lived in an open air. Spiritual unity ties the characters together who remain in the forest, for they will no longer struggle for power, but purposefully in concert with Nature. Duke Fredrick and Jaques remain at the Forest of Arden at the end of the play, while all the characters go to the court with a happy ending. Each character entered Arden single, and the main characters ended with marriage, a holy vocation and, a true king. This is the magic of the Forest of Arden that united everyone and made their lives better.

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