



Climate Change and Climate Risks in Literature: A Study Focused on Shakespeare's Works

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Introduction

■ Climate Change Defined

Long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, now primarily driven by human activities.

■ Literary Significance

Literature serves as a historical record of environmental awareness across centuries.

■ Shakespeare's Relevance

His works bridge Renaissance understanding of nature with contemporary environmental concerns.



Introduction

Situating Shakespeare in the Anthropocene

■ Anthropocene Defined

The current geological epoch, marked by significant human impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems.

■ Shakespeare's Relevance

His plays offer unique perspectives on human-nature relationships, mirroring our current environmental challenges.

■ Literary Ecocriticism

Applying environmental lens to analyze Shakespeare's works in the context of climate change.



Historical Context: Climate in Shakespeare's Era

■ Little Ice Age (1300s-1800s)

Period of cooling that brought unusually harsh winters and shortened growing seasons to Europe.

■ Elizabethan Challenges

Crop failures and food shortages led to social unrest. Thames River regularly froze. Farmers struggled with unpredictable harvests. Food prices rose dramatically during harsh years.

■ Urban Growth

London's rapid expansion brought new environmental challenges, including pollution and sanitation issues.

King Lear:

Nature's Wrath and the Breakdown of the Social Order

The Storm as Metaphor – Political Turmoil

The storm begins as Lear's kingdom falls into chaos and represents a breakdown of order both in nature and society.

Human Disharmony

King Lear's folly and the ensuing chaos are mirrored in the raging storm, highlighting the interconnectedness between human actions and natural consequences.

Ecological and Social Collapse

Lear's kingdom disintegrates, echoing the instability and disruption of the natural world.

***King Lear* : Climate Symbolism**

The Storm as Character

The tempest becomes almost a character itself, responding to and amplifying the human drama.

Political Metaphor

Shakespeare links environmental instability with political upheaval, a connection we recognize in modern climate discussions.

Environmental Vulnerability

Humans are ultimately at nature's mercy, regardless of social position.

Nature's Power and Human Vulnerability in *King Lear*

■ Key Lines

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow! / You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout /
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks! (3.2.1-3)

→ This reflects the chaos in Lear's mind and the kingdom's collapse

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are, / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, /
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, / Your loop'd and window'd raggedness,
defend you / From seasons such as these? (3.4.28-32)

→ This highlights human vulnerability in the face of nature's wrath.

***Macbeth*: Nature's Disorder and Political Chaos**

Power Corrupts

Macbeth's ambition leads to both social and natural disorder.

Unnatural Acts

The witches, who represent the supernatural, foreshadow Macbeth's dark ambition and the consequences of his actions. Throughout which nature's disruption intensifies, reflecting moral decay

Ecosystemic Consequences

The play suggests a connection between human transgressions and the consequences for nature.

Unnatural Ambition and the Disruption of the Natural World in *Macbeth*

■ Key Lines

So foul and fair a day I have not seen. (1.3.38)

A falcon, towering in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.
(2.4.12-13)

Though you untie the winds and let them fight / Against the churches; though the yeasty waves / Confound and swallow navigation up (4.1,52-54)

→ This symbolizes the catastrophic consequences of human transgressions on nature.

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Nature in Chaos

Seasons as Metaphor

Disrupted weather patterns mirror disrupted social and romantic relationships. Order in nature reflects order in human affairs.

Ecological Plot Device

The play's central conflict stems from environmental imbalance. Natural harmony only returns when human and fairy realms reconcile.

Characters describe unusual weather patterns and seasonal confusion.

The play suggests human actions and Fairy conflict contribute to natural imbalance.

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Nature in Chaos

The human mortals want their winter here.
No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound.
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 childing autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world
By their increase now knows not which is which.
(2.1.101-14)

Titania's Climate Speech

→ Titania's famous speech describes climate disruption with striking imagery of seasons out of order.



The "Unnatural" Weather Events in Shakespeare's Plays

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Unseasonable frosts and floods disrupt natural cycles, hinting at climate instability.

Julius Caesar

Unusual storms and celestial events foreshadow political upheaval and environmental chaos

Romeo and Juliet

Extreme heat waves reflect societal tensions and ecological imbalance.



Climate Risks and Social Commentary

Weather Event	Play	Social Commentary
Storms	<i>King Lear</i>	Political instability and flawed leadership
Harsh Winter	<i>Winter's Tale</i>	Irrational jealousy freezing human relations
Fog	<i>Macbeth</i>	Moral confusion and ethical ambiguity
Flooding	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Disruption of social and natural hierarchies

Shakespeare's Insights on Climate Risks

Weather Unpredictability

Shakespeare repeatedly portrays uncertain weather patterns disrupting human expectations.

Social Consequences

Environmental disruption leads to political instability and social suffering in his works.

Moral Dimension

Nature responds to human moral failings, suggesting an ethical relationship with the environment.

Lessons from Shakespeare for the Climate Change Era

■ Responsibility

Shakespeare reminds us that we have a responsibility to care for the natural world and to consider the long-term consequences of our actions.

■ Sustainability

His plays urge us to seek sustainable solutions that balance human needs with the health of the planet.

■ Collective Action

The plays emphasize the need for collective action and collaboration to address the challenges of the Anthropocene.

The Power of Narrative in Climate Action

■ Cultural Influence

Shakespeare's words continue to inspire environmental activism and awareness campaigns.

■ Interdisciplinary Approach

Bridging humanities and sciences creates more compelling climate narratives.

■ Grassroots Action

Shakespeare-inspired performances raise awareness about local environmental issues.

Teaching Shakespeare in the Anthropocene

- **Interdisciplinary Approach**

Combine literature, environmental science, and social studies.

- **Eco-Critical Analysis**

Encourage students to identify environmental themes in the plays.

- **Modern Parallels**

Draw connections between Shakespearean and contemporary environmental issues.

- **Adaptations: Shakespeare in the Context of Modern Climate Change**

Contemporary Shakespeare productions increasingly emphasize environmental themes, using staging, costuming, and settings to connect his works to current climate concerns.



Conclusion

- Shakespeare's works provide a valuable historical perspective on climate awareness spanning centuries.
- His poetic language helps us feel the impact of environmental change beyond dry statistics.
- Shakespeare demonstrates how art and science can work together to address global challenges.
- By learning from the past, we can better shape our environmental future with wisdom and compassion.

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Thank You