

CHALLENGING EXILE

A Critical Approach to Exile in Shakespeare's Late Dramas

PURPOSE

William Shakespeare used exile and banishment in many of his plays. However, the causes and purposes of exile are expanded and focused upon in his late dramas, particularly in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*. The purpose of my research is to find various forms of criticism on these plays that suggest a use of exile beyond punishment.

ARGUMENT & THESIS

My argument with this essay is simple: Exile is presented as a dynamic phenomenon in Shakespeare's late dramas. It is caused by nature and thrust upon individuals by their own desires. It is meant to protect and teach, not simply to punish. Through my research, I wanted to discover a cause for Shakespeare's obsession with exile in these late dramas. With the help of scholarship by Jane Kingsley-Smith, I was able to articulate and prove my notions that Shakespeare's use of exile in this period was influenced by his experiences with recusant Catholics and the British monarchy's use of the punishment.



Imogen Discovered in the Cave of Belarius—
George Dawe, 1809(Tate Gallery, London)



Miranda singing
before Pericles—
Thomas Stothard,
1825
(Folger
Shakespeare
Library Digital
Image Collection)

ABSTRACT

In his late dramas, particularly *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, William Shakespeare transformed exile. In these plays, Shakespeare presents exile as more than a punishment sentenced by powerful people; he shows that exile can be caused by nature or even self-induced. Likewise, exile in these plays does more than chastise—it renews and protects. If we also examine the experiences of recusant Catholics in Renaissance England, we can assert that Shakespeare's use of exile in his late dramas is a commentary on Jacobean power structures and their widespread use of banishment as a punishment. In *Challenging Exile*, I attempt to reinterpret Shakespearian exile as a means of renewal and as a commentary on banishment customs present in the playwright's contemporary society. With the assistance of carefully curated research, this essay examines and successfully finds a reasonable cause for Shakespeare's obsession with exile. A close reading of these plays shows that exile is a malleable concept, one that can be reinterpreted and applied to various situations in any time. I believe that *Challenging Exile* provides valuable insight into an area of Shakespearian criticism that is largely untouched.

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