

Maurice Hunt
Department of English
One Bear Place #97404
Baylor University
Waco, Texas 76798-7404

ABSTRACT

Age and Shakespeare's Three Seasons of Humankind

The memorable Shakespearean account of the ages of humankind is that of Jaques in *As You Like It*, wherein they are seven, those of the infant, schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, foolish elder (failing in sight and voice), and infantile *senex* (2.7.138-65). King Lear confirms Psalm 90's claim that if one lives beyond the natural lifetime of seventy, to eighty, his or her life is full of "labour and sorrow" (90.10). Superimposing the seven ages of humankind onto a life could assign a span of years to each, as John Hankins has shown. Shakespeare and his contemporaries likely assumed that seventy is the fulfilling limit of life, an assumption underscored by the belief that Queen Elizabeth's death at age 70 showed that her reign was Providential. Likewise the 70 years of a life could be apportioned to the four seasons of the year. Shakespeare appears to adopt the four-seasons model for humankind's lifetime in Sonnet 73

But he undercuts this assumption by having Old Adam in *As You Like It* speak of his age of "almost fourscore" as a "lusty winter" (2.3.48, 53); and he deviates from it by adopting in *The Winter's Tale* a three-season paradigm for a lifetime. The omission of one of the seasons occasionally occurs in the Shakespeare canon. Time leads Summer directly to Winter in Sonnet 5.5-6; Winter's hand defaces Summer, with no intervention of Spring in Sonnet 6.1-2); and "after summer evermore succeeds / Barren winter," Gloucester says in *2 Henry VI* (2.4.1-4). Likewise, in *The Winter's Tale* Perdita speaks of "the year growing ancient, / Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth of trembling winter" (4.4.79-81). Identifying the ages of major characters of *The Winter's Tale* is possible. In the calculations of F. W. Bateson and Stephen Orgel, 16 and especially 23 are key numbers: the latter recurs throughout the play, and Time the Chorus, telling playgoers that sixteen years elapse between parts one and two of this dramatic romance, turns his hourglass during verse 16 of a thirty-two-line speech. Calculations involving the number 16 make the ages of Iago in *Othello* and that of Leontes at the beginning of the play identical, reinforcing the relevance of this tragedy for interpreting *The Winter's Tale*, while those involving 23 make the three-season scheme of a lifetime exactly fit the seventy-year model and Leontes in the last acts of the romance either at—or virtually at—Shakespeare's age when he composed *The Winter's Tale* in 1610 or 1611. Given the integer 23 at the three-score-and-ten biblical lifetime, Shakespeare writing this play would himself be very close in age—46—to the death of Summer and the birth of trembling Winter.

BRIEF BIO

I am Research Professor of English at Baylor University, where I am the English Department Shakespearean. My most recent book and articles are *Shakespeare's Speculative Art* (2011) and "Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunante Traveller*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*," *Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900* (2014) and "The Breaches of Shakespeare's *Henry V*," *College Literature* (2014).

Dorothy Todd
University of Georgia
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Shakespeare and the Seasons

"The Seasons Alter":
Unruly Seasons and Female Sexual Bodies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play deeply interested in questions of gender and sex. More specifically, as numerous scholars have noted, Shakespeare's play addresses anxieties about female authority through male attempts to control, circumscribe, and conquer female unruliness. From the play's first act to the fairies' final blessings in Act Five, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* points to marriage and to the submission of women to male control as the primary means by which to neutralize female authority—especially female sexual authority—and preserve male dominance.

In addition to the question of if and how society can conquer female sexuality, the multidimensional relationship between the city of Athens and the heterotopic space of the woods is also a central feature of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While the city of Athens marks the passing of time through the "iron tongue" (5.1.349) of clock strikes and the measured risings and settings of the sun, time in the woods becomes uneven and unpredictable as festival elements that relate to specific calendar dates begin to merge and meld, the "wandering moon" (4.1.97) seems to abandon her normal lunar cycle, and the seasons become discordant and unpredictable.

It is the intersection in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* of the circumscription of female sexuality and the heterotopia of the green world outside of Athens that propels the argument of this paper. Specifically, I am interested in the delineation of time in the green world through images and details of moon cycles, festivals, plants, and agricultural patterns, and in the intersection of the green world's seasonality with female sexuality. Through a humoral reading of Titania's monologue about seasonal discord as well as a brief examination of other contemporaneous texts, my paper argues that the nexus of natural cycles and the female sexual body in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reveals the play's interest in attempts to bend both female sexuality and the natural world to men's needs and desire. The rhetoric of natural seasons is inscribed upon women's bodies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, not to highlight the sexual submission of women to men at the play's end but instead to suggest the continued unruliness of the female sexual body and of Mother Nature.

The Northern Hemisphere experienced colder than normal winters, the so-called “Little Ice Age,” during the late medieval and early modern period. In the Low Countries, Dutch artists who had given pioneered the landscape painting and its variations paid particular attention to winter landscapes in this period. Pieter Brueghel the Elder and Jacob Grimmer, for instance, produced a wide variety of paintings in this subgenre. As one might expect, these paintings repay particular attention – both for the quiet stillness they evoke and for the boisterous playfulness to be found in them. One contemporary of Shakespeare, Hendrick Avercamp, specialized in landscapes of this sort. In this paper, I will juxtapose readings of Avercamp’s winter landscapes with Shakespeare’s attention to the winter season, especially as these relate to the notion of cycles of death and stillness leading to birth and activity.

“Trifled Former Knowings”: Thomas Hill and Shakespeare’s Cosmological Readers

Thomas Hill (c. 1528—c. 1574) was a remarkably versatile compiler and avid translator. His works include the famous *Proffitable Arte of Gardening*, a dream interpretation tract, a disquisition on the art of physiognomy and moleosophy (the interpretation of moles), and several almanacs. In large part, Hill’s work contains natural explanations on cosmological and terrestrial phenomena alongside describing the preternatural signs that such occurrences portend. Most of Hill’s compilations were marketed to a diverse audience of readers, and thus his texts advanced methods for reading astrological and terrestrial change. Hill investigates how individuals from a variety of professional and educational backgrounds experience the changes in both the skies and upon the land. In examining Hill’s corpus of work on natural and preternatural phenomena, this paper will seek to understand how Shakespeare is in conversation with such methods of popular reading of the cosmos and the seasons. Shakespeare stages a *process* of non-elite reading, one that turns to contemporary cosmological understandings of seasonal change in authors such as Hill and almanacs from the period.

I aim to discuss texts such as Hill’s alongside Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, particularly by looking at the enigmatic figure of the Old Man. Only appearing once in *Macbeth*, the Old Man offers commentary on the natural and cosmological changes that Scotland witnesses under Macbeth’s tyrannous rule. What is conspicuous about the Old Man is his authority in reading and interpreting the natural world: “Threescore and ten I can remember well, / Within the volume of which time I have seen / Hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore night / Hath trifled former knowings” (2.4.1-4). In describing his vast experience of nature as a “volume” upon which he has recorded his understanding of the natural world, the Old Man nonetheless admits there are certain phenomena that defy interpretation. Ross, in easy concourse with this figure, replies with a reading of the heavens signifying impending doom, “Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man’s act, / Threatens his bloody stage” (2.4.5-6). In their exchange, the Old Man and Ross exhibit the type of reading found in Hill’s work, using the heavens as a text upon which to interpret a disruption of seasonal alteration. Both Shakespeare’s drama and Hill’s works present a simplified, but potent, reading of how the natural and preternatural worlds influence individual human agents within the unfolding of seasonal alteration. The signs that such changes and deviations from this cyclicity portend, moreover, become crucial texts for non-elite characters in their reading of the environment.

Bio:

Katherine Walker is a Ph.D. Candidate in English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She researches early modern science, demonology, and folklore, looking particularly at how discourses of animistic or preternatural ecologies operate in drama. Published work includes ‘Sometimes an Actor Himself’: Robert Burton and Therapeutic Theatricality,” *Prose Studies* 35.3 (2013); “Spectatorship and Vision in *The York Corpus Christi Plays*,” *Comitatus* (September 2014); and “Early Modern Almanacs and The Witch of Edmonton,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* (Forthcoming). She is currently completing a dissertation titled “Reading the Natural and Preternatural Worlds in Early Modern Drama” and working on a critical digital edition of Thomas Hill’s works. Katherine is also the co-editor of *Ethos: A Digital Review of Arts, Humanities, and Public Ethics* (ethosreview.org).

Jennifer Munroe
UNC Charlotte
SAA 2015: Vancouver, CA
“Shakespeare and the Seasons” Seminar

All are subject to “seasons such as these?”:
An Ecofeminist Reading of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*

*King Lear*¹ illustrates why we need an ecofeminist reading of Shakespeare: like Shakespeare’s play, ecofeminism asks us to rethink the notion of human exceptionalism, but it also interrogates the links between gender and class and humans’ domination over the nonhuman world. Or, to put it another way that relates directly to the theme of this seminar, *King Lear* compels us to acknowledge how we are all—equally—subject to the seasons in a way suggestive of what Stacy Alaimo calls “transcorporeality,” or understanding how the human is corporeally “intertwined with the more-than-human world,” even co-produced by and with rather than subject of/over it.² In this way, I deviate considerably from ecocritic Steve Mentz’s analysis, which concludes the opposite; for Mentz, the play emphasizes the “strained relationship between human bodies and the non-human environment” (139), not their interrelationship.³ This paper explores the possibilities of looking at this play from an ecofeminist perspective, and it considers what doing so offers that other readings do not. At stake here is a reading that shows how the play exchanges the notion of the individual for

¹ All references to the play come from the following edition: Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Ed. R.A. Foakes. London: Arden/Thomson Learning, 1997. Rpt. 2001.

² Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2010: 2.

³ Mentz, Steve. “Strange weather in *King Lear*”, *Shakespeare*, 6 (2010): 2, 139 — 152. See esp. p. 139. <http://stevementz.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Strange-Weather-in-King-Lear.pdf>

the prominence of the organism in the sense that human and nonhuman are characterized not as discrete categories but as intraconnected elements of the same, collectively comprised whole that revalues the importance of women, the poor, and the nonhuman as integral, agentic participants.

Much scholarly focus thus far has been on the play's central character, Lear. He is, of course, the title character of the play, its tragic hero. Even ecocritics, whose supposed aim is to decenter the human, might consider the importance of, say, the storm as a meteorological event rather than just a manifestation of Lear's internal turmoil, but they spend considerable pages explicating almost exclusively the complexities of his (largely self-induced) tragedy. As some have recently pointed out, though, Lear's singular importance is deemphasized in the play--as a way to push back against the human exceptionalism, as Laurie Shannon writes,⁴ or to lament a human "alienation from the biophysical world," as Todd Borlik argues.⁵ But by focusing in particular on Lear, even to show how the play uses his character to resist the notion of human exceptionalism or anthropocentrism, scholars risk reifying the "human" as a universal (and dominant, and male) category. That is, even as ecocritical scholars seem to deconstruct a model of human exceptionalism by showing how the play resists it, reproducing Lear as primary focus deemphasizes (even ignores) *how* the play enacts such resistance. Such ecocritical work may seek to trouble the human/nonhuman binary, but unless we also trouble the way that such a binary is linked to gender and class, as the play does, we ultimately reinforce the disenfranchisement of women, the poor, and the nonhuman alike. And so, I offer an ecofeminist intervention into our readings of Shakespeare's play to do so. King Lear reaches the (inevitable) conclusion that he has "ta'en

⁴ See Shannon, Laurie. *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

⁵ See Borlik, Todd. *Ecocriticism and Early Modern Literature: Green Pastures*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

too little care of this,” or his human vulnerability by way of physically experiencing the pelting rain on his skin and realizing that this vulnerability negates his sense of superiority. Such transcorporeality is expressed in the play as simultaneously disrupting the boundary between human and nonhuman and between rich and poor; it is also expressed by way of experiential knowledge that is associated not just with the poor but with Cordelia. For what remains of this paper, I will consider such expressions and their implications.

More than just depicting Lear as vulnerable to the elements, to the seasons themselves in the storm, the scene demonstrates his transition from resistance to recognition of this vulnerability. Lear first curses the storm, attempting to command it as he has (unsuccessfully) attempted to command heavens, earth, and the beings that inhabit it throughout the play. He famously cries out,

Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ the world,
Crack nature’s moulds, all germens spill at once
That make ungrateful man! (3.2. 1-9)

Here, Lear attempts to assert control over the storm, demanding that it act upon him, that it “blow,” “rage,” “singe,” “strike,” “crack” and otherwise employ its full force against Lear’s aging and weary body. By commanding as Lear does, he tries to position himself as sovereign over the elements much as he does when the play opens and he executes his “darker purpose” and pledges to divide the kingdom into three parts: “Know that we have divided / In three our kingdom; and ‘tis our fast intent / To shake all cares and business from our age, / Conferring them on younger strengths” (1.1. 35-39). In a decision that catalyzes much of the tragic action in the play, the play suggests that Lear makes a critical

miscalculation, one that he continues to make early in the storm: he believes that he has control over the nonhuman—first, land, and later, the elements themselves. In the case of the first, power to distribute (and reconstitute boundaries of) the land he occupies; and in the case of the second, power to command a meteorological phenomenon that transpires having nothing to do with his words.

Later in the storm, however, Lear comes to recognize that which the play shows all along, that his power is a delusion. Having refused (again) to enter the hovel that might shelter him from the storm's power, Lear speaks quite differently than before:

[Kneels.] Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bid the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just. (3.4.28-36)

What Lear expresses here that he hasn't (or at least hasn't as fully or in the same way) until now is empathy and compassion; experiencing the "pelting" of the "seasons," the points of contact where the storm meets his skin, allows him to understand in a new way that he has been wrong all along. As the play shows, and as scholars have commented on, Lear's "Too little care" is characterized by a human arrogance over the things of nature. But what scholars have discussed much less often is how such arrogance is simultaneously toward the poor such that the human exceptionalism rejected by the play applies equally (and at the same moment) to hierarchies of human over human *and* human over nonhuman.⁶ They are,

⁶ This moment in Lear calls to my mind a recent piece from *The Guardian*, which details an assault on the homeless by which (in London, Hamburg, New York, and elsewhere) city officials install various structural elements to prevent men and women from sleeping in public spaces. Shakespeare, it would seem, has much to teach them: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/feb/18/defensive-architecture-keeps-poverty-undeen-and-makes-us-more-hostile>.

as this moment demonstrates, part and parcel of the same deluded notion of power. For just as Lear identifies with the “Poor naked wretches” that experience the same rain, the same seasons (in the sense of seasonal variation as well as the human “seasons” that remind Lear of his mortality) as he does, the pelting rain that pierces his skin underscores not humans’ “separation from the nonhuman world,” as Steve Mentz has argued (143),⁷ but rather their interconnection. Lear and the rain are enmeshed in a transcorporeal relationship by which the boundaries between one and the other blur; and, as the play demonstrates, Lear’s recognition of such transcorporeal connection occurs at the same time he recognizes the same of his relationship with his fellow human, the “Poor naked wretches” who are like, who are, him—subject to the same pelting rain, the same cycle of mortality. And we might also note that when he does so, according to the stage directions he also kneels, falling prostrate at the foot of those over whom he has considered himself to that point sovereign—the earth, the elements, the poor. What *Lear* teaches, then, is akin to what we might call “environmental justice” today, that which is the focus of ecofeminist politics and scholarship.

But if we stop with Lear, or even if he remains our primary point of focus (his failings, his discoveries), then we miss the point. After all, other characters in the play “get” what Lear comes too late to understand, only they are marginalized or ignored. In particular, Cordelia and Edgar-as-Poor Tom articulate and value a connection between themselves and the nonhuman world, a linkage that ecofeminists contend undergirds binaries related to humans and nonhumans (and women and the poor) that allows for the human subjection of

⁷ See esp 143.

human and nonhuman Others. And both value answers to pressing questions derived from everyday experience, from that connection between humans and nonhumans rather than human separation or a belief in the supernatural. When Lear asks Poor Tom, for instance, “What is the cause of thunder?” and inquires about his “study,” Poor Tom replies, “How to prevent the fiend and kill vermin,” locating his knowledge source in household work rather than the work of the heavens or gods (3.4.151, 153-54). And when Lear calls Poor Tom his “philosopher,” Tom responds with a most practical, visceral, “Tom’s-a-cold” (3.4.168-69). We might also recall that when donning the disguise of Poor Tom, Edgar takes the “basest and most poorest shape” of man while hiding in the hollow of a tree (2.3. 178); and he takes as his example the “Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices, / Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms / Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary” (2.2.185-87).

Cordelia is likewise associated with household work—in her case, the medicinal cures that a housewife might create to heal the sick in her household. Cordelia describes Lear in his altered state, crowned with wild plants, which she identifies as “rank fumiter and furrow-weeds / With burdocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers, / Darnel and all the idle weeds that grow / In our sustaining corn” (4.4.3-6). The plants she describes, all of which would likely grow plentifully in the English countryside, have medicinal uses that range from diuretics and purgatives to ingredients for ointments or even poison. Her identifying the plants followed by her instructions to the others in the scene to “Be aidant and remediate / In the good man’s distress” (4.4.17-18) suggest that her concern for Lear’s welfare goes beyond his psychological state and are pointed as much to his physical health as well. Cordelia begins her directive to “remediate” Lear with the claim that “All blest secrets, / All you unpublished virtues of the earth, / Spring with my tears” (4.4.15-17). That is, as Cordelia identifies knowledge about the “unpublished virtues” of the earth itself with her own

corporeality, her “tears,” she points to a cure for Lear’s apparent madness as being embodied in herself and the nonhuman world.

In fact, Cordelia’s response to Lear’s seeming madness might help us rethink how we understand the implications of madness in the play. Carol Neely calls Lear’s madness in the play a move from supernatural to natural, but by “natural” Neely means a broader shift from understanding causes to be attributed to the gods, for instance, to being explained using logic and reason based on what we can see, touch, and hear.⁸ How might thinking about this play from an ecofeminist perspective, then, also change the way we understand the “natural” and thus Lear’s madness? What if madness in the play is expressed in the play as a state of transcorporeality? That is, while mad, Lear is out of sorts, unable anymore to differentiate in ways he had before: his hierarchical authority as father or king, his privileged standing as human over the nonhuman world? But if indeed the play moves toward an alternative mode of being, one that values transcorporeal connection between humans and nonhumans, then isn’t it also toward madness? If so, then madness is not a state to be lamented, but rather a release from what the play may be suggesting is a primary human (and dominant male) delusion: that such categories can be bounded or cordoned off in the first place. What if, that is, being mad does not cause Lear to lose everything or even just express loss, but rather it is the precondition for his discovery or its simultaneous articulation? We might recall that Lear’s “madness” emerges most fully during the storm scene, where scholars have often discussed the storm as simply a physical manifestation of Lear’s internal turmoil.⁹ Even

⁸ See Neely, Carol. *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.

⁹ Simon Estok, who insists that we think of the storm as an actual meteorological event, is a notable exception to this. However, Estok argues that the result of Lear’s encounter with the storm reinforces the sensibility that Estok calls “ecophobia.” See *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia*. New York: Palgrave, 2011.

ecocritics have suggested that the storm scene punctuates Lear's separation from the nonhuman world (Mentz). But if, as I have argued, the moments when the play seems most clearly to identify Lear as mad occur at the same time he experiences (and acknowledges) his transcorporeal connection with the rain, with the nonhuman, and with the poor, then would not his state of madness in fact also be a heightened state not of disconnect but of belonging—not, as he believes early in the play, to a world based on the notion of hierarchy (political, familial, gender, class, and human over nonhuman), but to an integrated, organic whole where human and nonhuman (and categories of class and gender) dissolve into one another, their boundaries indistinguishable?

Lear speaks in such terms while aiming to comfort Cordelia when they are taken as prisoners. She laments, "We are not the first / Who with best meaning have incurred the worst" (5.3. 3-4), to which he responds by telling her, "We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage. / When thou dost ask me blessing I'll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live / And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh / At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues / Talk of court news" (5.3. 9-13). In this scene, Lear subjects himself to Cordelia, kneeling (as he does earlier when he subjects himself to the pelting storm) and positioning himself at the level not of father or king but as fellow (and fallen) human; but Lear and Cordelia are simultaneously connected with the nonhuman world, both "birds i'the cage" and like the "gilded butterflies"—and a few lines later, "like foxes" whose activity is not directed by their human captors but guided by the "ebb and flow by the moon" (5.4. 23, 18).

If we take an ecofeminist approach to *King Lear*, we can see that the tragedy of the play may not so much be the fall of a once-great monarch, the dissolution of familial bonds, but rather the human arrogance that leads to a mutual domination of the nonhuman, the

poor, and women alike. Bearing Cordelia, dead, in his arms, Lear says, “She’s dead as earth” (5.3. 258). In this most intimate moment, Lear articulates what the play demonstrates over and over again: we are, ultimately, earth. And, if we are to believe the stage direction, he immediately proceeds to lay her down, on earth, to punctuate this fact. If indeed the play does present us with such a framework, then hierarchies of various sorts are rendered moot: class, gender, and human/nonhuman in particular. The play, therefore, advocates for a sensitivity to the priorities of what we today might call environmental justice, insisting that such hierarchies are destructive to all involved. Lear may come to realize this midway through the play, but Edgar (as Poor Tom especially) and, perhaps especially Cordelia, seem to understand it all along. In her response to Lear’s demand to link her love for her father to land acquisition, Cordelia repeats, simply, “Nothing”:

Lear: Strive to be interested, what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.
Cordelia: Nothing, my Lord.
Lear: Nothing?
Cordelia: Nothing.
Lear: How, nothing will come of nothing. (1.1. 85-90)

Cordelia’s “Nothing” negates the value Lear places in land-as-commodity (and daughters likewise), the notion that either humans or nonhumans can/should be acquired, dominated, hierarchized. Lear’s emphasis on people and place as “thing” to be had and distributed becomes “no” thing—that is, not things in Lear’s sense but, as we see later in the play, things part of a larger organic whole, invested with value in their own right, apart from human acquisition, possession, and/or domination. While Lear misses the irony in his “nothing will come of nothing” (he is indeed correct), he realizes only too late that in the end, the human body is nothing more than earth, that earth and the nonhuman things that occupy it can no more be dispersed or traded than the humans that reside on it. In *Lear*, “nothing” is everything.

Hillary Nunn
The University of Akron

The White Devil's Theatrical Climates

The 1612 printing of John Webster's *The White Devil* infamously blames the weather for the play's initial failure. In a section entitled "To the Reader," Webster claims the play could not connect to its amphitheater audience because it "was acted in so dull a time of winter, presented in so open and black a theater" (4-5). Scholars have generally identified the theater as the Red Bull, based on the title page's association with Queen Anne's Men, and, until recently, few scholars questioned Webster's introductory claim that the venue's crowd could not appreciate his learned style. Most scholars have not questioned Alexander Leggatt's assertion that *The White Devil's* troubles arose because Red Bull audiences required a dramatic story be told in "a clear and satisfying way, creating a sense of community between stage and audience" (128). The play's complicated plotting of Vittoria Corombona's affair with Bracciano, he argues, failed to create such a sympathetic connection.

The play's characters often perceive a similar gap between themselves and the events in which they are embroiled, only their lack of connection stems from a feeling of sensory isolation from the unfolding action. As Farrah Lehman Den shows, *The White Devil* routinely frustrates its characters' desire for a fully satisfying experience of the play's events, resulting in "moments of failed sensory encounter" with their surroundings. I suggest that these moments of failed sensory encounter happen for playhouse viewers as well, and that *The White Devil* both illustrates and perpetuates this sense of distance between the world of the play and the physical environment that the audience occupies. The play's repetitive, contradictory invocations of the seasons, and of the temperature extremes invoked by these references, could easily have contributed to its failure in an outdoor venue. The text grafts together suggestions of hot and cold weather, creating descriptions that, while thematically appropriate, nonetheless produce contradictory sensory input for the audience members. Just when audience members begin to bask in the warmth of spoken summery images, a character describes a frigid scene; before a cold pattern can fully take hold, a warm one intrudes, only to be overtaken within the next few lines with frosty descriptions. This tug of war between hot and cold, I suggest, not only deprived the already-shivering Red Bull audience members of any escape into a balmy Italian clime; it also destabilized their vision of the unfolding action, frustrating their ability to assemble the play's elements into a satisfying whole.