

2017 SAA Seminar: Terrestrial Shakespeare Abstracts
Leaders: Marjorie Rubright, University of Toronto
Respondent: Jean Feerick, John Carroll University 1

Julia Mix Barrington

A Fortress Built by Nature: The Silver Sea and National Security in Shakespeare's Histories

My paper builds off of Lynn Staley's concept of the fortified island, where the barrier of the sea protects England from foreign invaders. While Staley sees this image as a faithful constant throughout English literature, I contend that Shakespeare's plays articulate ambivalence about the natural fortifications of the island: in plays like *King John*, the sea does repel invaders, but plays like *Cymbeline* and *Richard II* prove more ambiguous. All in all, in Shakespeare's work, the sea permits invasions nearly as often as it thwarts them.

With this in mind, I argue that the sea is often not merely a wall, but rather a trial or an ordeal, allowing in invaders who will ultimately shape the English nation (for example, the Romans of *Cymbeline*) while rebuffing those, such as the French, who truly threaten the Elizabethan English identity. Furthermore, I point out that ascribing this sort of distinction and even agency to the ocean around England participates in a tradition of the sea as moral arbiter that has its origins in both the pre-Christian legends and the saints' lives of Medieval Europe.

Robin Bates

Pastoral Dreaming: Shifting Land Use and Motive for Murder in *Arden Of Faversham*

Arden of Faversham is situated in a time of massive shifts in land ownership caused by the dissolution of the monasteries and the transfer of church properties to acquisitive landowners who could re-envision the uses of land and the values of large estates. Two monologues in the play suggest differing understandings of what, and who, land was for. Mosby, envisioning himself in the lord's chair after murdering Arden, uses language of tillage to describe his scheme, leaning on a Georgic view of land use that was falling out of fashion in a time that estate owners became more interested in the profit and leisure that could be had from estates that shifted to pastoral uses. Mosby's approach, associated with the feudal past, would be dependent on laborers like those whose pleas for upholding their rights to land Arden ignores. Arden's vision is one associated with the shift away from labor-intensive (and laborer-dependent) tillage and imagines instead land for leisure activities like hunting, available only to the wealthy landowners who enclosed portions of their estates for deer parks. Arden's vision, however, is a nightmarish one in which he is the hunted deer.

Roya Biggie

"Breast-deep in earth": Perverse Horticulture in *Titus Andronicus*

In the final act of *Titus Andronicus*, Lucius demands that Aaron suffer for his crimes: "Set him breast-deep in earth, and famish him;/ There let him stand and rave and cry for food/...Some stay to see him fastened in the earth" (5.3.178-179, 182). As scholars have suggested and as I have argued elsewhere, Lavinia becomes a human-tree figure after her mutilation and rape. Less attention has been

2017 SAA Seminar: Terrestrial Shakespeare Abstracts
Leaders: Marjorie Rubright, University of Toronto
Respondent: Jean Feerick, John Carroll University 2

paid to the image of Aaron as a sylvan-human body. In this paper, I explore the metamorphosis Lucius envisions while drawing attention to the play's earlier descriptions of the forest as an area bereft of tree life. Aaron convinces Chiron and Demetrius that the woods are ideal for rape and villainy not because they provide a leafy shield, but because the "forest walks are wide and spacious" (2.1.114). Aside from a single yew, Lavinia seems to be the sole tree within this plot of land. Moments after her death, Lucius attempts quite literally to plant another human-tree hybrid as he insists that Aaron remain "breast-deep" within the earth. By considering the affective vitality early moderns attributed to botanic life, as well as the consequence of deforestation, I suggest that Lucius secures a political future, in part, through refusing to nourish particular bodies or trees.

Sarah Linwick

The Binds of Epistemology and Identity in *Comedy of Errors*: Ecology, Blood, and Gender

In William Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, Luciana urges Adriana to acknowledge her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, as the "bridle of her will." As Luciana reasons, "There's nothing situate under heaven's eye / But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky"; just as males preside as masters within and across nonhuman kinds, men "Are masters to their females, and their lords." Ecological assumptions, metaphors, and vocabulary reinforce naturalized social hierarchies not only of gender but also of lineage or blood throughout the play. I suggest, however, that recurrent yet varied uses of "bound," "bond," and "bind" in *Comedy of Errors* also contribute to the destabilization of these hierarchies. Drawing from contemporaneous botanical treatises and recalling that "bind" could refer to a shoot or vine in the period's discourse, I show how the terrestrial bounds that the play's characters imagine fixing their identities gradually become less rigid and more pliable, mobile, and vine-like. Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to begin to explore the different conflicting and complementary ways that ideas about vines and vine iconography allowed early moderns to reassess their knowledge of themselves and others.

Marianne Montgomery

Hamlet's Metallic Figures

My essay explores Shakespeare's metallic figures of speech in *Hamlet*. From Hamlet's address of the ghost as a mole and pioneer to Gertrude's simile describing Hamlet's madness as "like some ore / Among a mineral of metals base" to persistent puns on "o'er/ore" and "metal/mettle," these figures call attention to moral and epistemological questions. I'm interested in how Shakespeare uses geology to figure human relations. In a period when metallurgy was not clearly distinguished from alchemy, when mining required the reading of unstable and contested signs on the earth, and when assays of ores were sometimes untrustworthy, metals raise key issues: How do we know substances and their properties?; How might these structures of knowledge be extended to human relations?; How is mining represented as a moral activity? To help make sense of Hamlet's metallic figures, I juxtapose them with influential early modern texts on metallurgy and mining such as Biringuccio's *De La*

2017 SAA Seminar: Terrestrial Shakespeare Abstracts
Leaders: Marjorie Rubright, University of Toronto
Respondent: Jean Feerick, John Carroll University 3

Pirotechnia and Agricola's *De Re Metallica*. I will also likely consider the representation of miners' experiences with ghosts in Lavater's *Of Ghosts*. I hope to show in this paper that looking at the material histories of metals can help us to mine new depths in familiar figures in *Hamlet*.

T.J. Moretti

Green Fantasies of Conquest in *Henry V*

In this paper, I investigate *Henry V*'s ecological fantasies. These not only underwrite the play's masculinizing fantasies of military and sexual conquests, but also hide male vulnerabilities made apparent during such conquests. The play imagines fertile fields that need no cultivation, caves that can speak, history that can be imprinted on land as if on a page, and land that nonetheless remains impervious. Such ecological fantasies are apt analogues for the play's fantasies of conquest—fantasies of progeny without insemination, of war without invasion—because both sets of fantasies resist and avoid penetration. Indeed, avoidance of penetration—sexual, military, political, geological, and agricultural—is crucial to this play's fantasies, I argue, because the penetrations that are necessary for Henry to conquer land, realm, people, and history are also harbingers of physical, political, social, and environmental diseases. According to *Henry V*, conquests cannot gain support, let alone succeed, without what the Prologue calls "imaginary forces"; and yet, conquests cannot occur without material transmissions on fields, in caves, among bodies, and within courts and bed chambers.

Jessie Herrada Nance

Colonial Ecology in *As You Like It*

In her article on the connection between England's colonial aspirations and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Leah Marcus argues that "part of the attraction of [the play] is that it allows its readers or viewers to play armchair colonials: to imagine various stances in relation to an alien population without incurring danger" (174). Intrigued by Marcus's idea, this paper explores the play's colonial connection from an ecological perspective. It asks how the play's pastoral forest setting mirrors descriptions of "alien" ecology found in colonial writings about the Americas. It argues that the adventures the courtiers have in the Forest of Arden register colonial concerns: hardship in unfamiliar environments, economic hegemony, and resource scarcity. Examining the play from this perspective brings to light the ways in which for the "armchair colonial," *As You Like It*'s forest setting is an imaginative place where the English can safely consider what it takes (and if it is possible) to establish a successful colony. To explore this, I compare the courtiers' Arden adventures to descriptions of environment found in Ralph Lane's *Discourse on the First Colony, 1585-1586*, an "apologia" in which Lane explains why the settlers under his governance failed to establish a colony at Roanoke.

Stephanie Shirilan

Murky Air and *Macbeth*

2017 SAA Seminar: Terrestrial Shakespeare Abstracts
Leaders: Marjorie Rubright, University of Toronto
Respondent: Jean Feerick, John Carroll University 4

Early modern writers ascribed a potency to air as the medium of perception and cognition that contradicts pervasive literary invocations of air as both the very sign of emptiness and the repository of things disappeared from sight. My project investigates the ways in which air serves as both matter *and* medium for meditating on the persistence of memory in the theater. Natural philosophers accounted for the potency of sounds and images that hang in the air in the form both of literal echoes and more diffuse echoic effects. Shakespeare's prolific, synaesthetic use of homonymy and homophony invites us to meditate on the materiality of his medium that makes airborne words and images so promiscuous. The exemplary instance of this is the homophonic series err/heir/air. What theme is more material to Tudor/Jacobean politics than succession? What sign invokes insubstantiality more readily than *air* – and why? How do these homophones contaminate one another: inheritance uprooted by sonic association with air, air contradicting its supposed immateriality by producing effects that persist despite protestations that they are “vanished”? My seminar paper takes up these questions with regard to the murkiness of air and its apparitions in *Macbeth*, which I read as symptoms of failed community – the failure of the state that discriminates too easily between public and private suffering or “fee grief.”

Jennifer C. Vaught

The Passionate Body as a Built Environment in *Antony and Cleopatra*

In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare represents the passionate body as a built environment. Building on ecocritical approaches to Shakespeare, which have focused more extensively on earth and water than air and fire, I examine how the passionate body is situated amongst these four elements. In contrast to landlocked Rome and its stony ruler Octavius, water that ebbs and flows tends to define Egypt ruled by Cleopatra. Excess and the overflowing of indeterminate boundaries between land and sea are further characteristic of Egypt ruled by an amphibious, crocodile-like Queen. Yet characters traveling from cities to battlefields on land and water contribute to the blurring of differences between Rome, Egypt, and their inhabitants. Wind and fire provide elemental metaphors for the Eros of Antony and Cleopatra. Noise pollution, which invades the airways in the guise of slander and false reports, infects the reputations of Antony and Cleopatra. She contributes to this pollution herself through prophetic curses about the sinking of Antony and by manipulating Octavius's rumormongering to her advantage. This Roman play entreats the audience to attend to the dangers of slanderous tongues, misreporting, and mishearing and showcases how a ruler's attentive ear benefits the commonwealth and its abuse ruins it. Although Cleopatra is ultimately imprisoned in her sandstone monument besieged by Octavius, its elemental situation near the Nile provides her with a degree of agency. Her native asp from Egyptian slime offers her a well-composed death.

Daniel Vitkus

“Timon's Root: Shakespeare and the Limits of Micro-Material Ecology”

2017 SAA Seminar: Terrestrial Shakespeare Abstracts
Leaders: Marjorie Rubright, University of Toronto
Respondent: Jean Feerick, John Carroll University 5

Early modern drama often grapples nostalgically and tropically with a terrestrial materialism, but at the same time gestures toward the emergent structures of capital and their disruptive power. What are the strengths and limitations of eco-critical readings that define human beings and their consciousness as mere objects in a networked object-world? How far can we go in pursuing an object-oriented ontology (with its emphasis on vibrant matter, things, material objects, etc.) as a guide to reading literary texts, including Shakespeare? Taking Middleton and Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* as a case study, where do we see, in that play, a message about our human rootedness in terrestrial processes? What are the connections or gaps between misanthropic earthiness (rejecting the marketplace, the city, and human society) and the compelling causal force of human political economy (with all of its abstractions, reifications, and fetishizations)? Is the play's staging of misanthropy a corrective to anthropocentrism? Or rather, does the play demonstrate the futility of trying to regain an unaccommodated, natural life by disavowing human relationships? When our approach to textual terrestriality is grounded (or mired?) in local objects, in non-human species and inanimate things, without adequate attention to larger frameworks, human agencies, and political economies, it ceases to do the kind of effective political work that would identify the intertwined histories of ecocide and capitalism and reveal connections between the early modern emergence of globalization and the postmodern global crisis.