

Sex=Death, “world-without-end,” and the Representation of Earth in 5.2 of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*

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In my paper for “Ecologies and/or Resistance,” using 5.2 of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as an example, I will make the case that close reading of Shakespeare’s texts reveals how these texts attend to the realities of life on earth. By “realities,” here, I mean the inseparability of death from life, the interrelations of life forms, and the decay of all bodies. Attention to those realities was characteristic of an earlier world, a world prior to the scaled-up, technologically advanced world we live in that is threatening the destruction of creaturely life. Paradoxically, the scaled-up, technologically advanced world is predicated, as Science Studies shows, on a denial of those realities, a denial that, in Bruno Latour’s words, “it is the *cosmos* that is the given for human experience, not just what is the result of human intentionality and the ‘lived’ world.” 5.2 of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, like all of Shakespeare, is replete with the details of that given cosmos, his earth. Thus, in my close reading of that scene, I will be demonstrating a point that could be made by close reading almost any of Shakespeare’s texts. I will argue that they embed and are embedded with the details of that earlier world, and that these details—their references to human and nonhuman bodily life and death (including the life and death of plants and planets), sex, voice and song, spirituality and spiritual texts, and the Ancient world—are as significant as the contemporary (to Shakespeare) “cultural references” that have occupied much of the criticism of the play. I will also argue that teaching attention to these details and realities is vitally important these days (pun intended).

Roya Biggie

Sympathetic Wombs and Elemental Vulnerability in *King Lear*

In this paper, I examine Lear's subtle references to hidden sympathies, specifically as he curses his daughters and reflects on his vulnerability to the elements. Targeting Goneril's reproductive organs, Lear in part echoes language found in contemporaneous plague tracts that attributes the onset of the disease to the result of an inherent attraction between the body and noxious air. Drawing too on beliefs regarding the womb's occult powers, its mysterious ability to attract not only male seed, but also, in Lear's imaginary, corrupt air and fog, Lear establishes a correlation between elemental penetration and fellow feeling; by giving birth to a cursed child, the fruit of corrupt air, Goneril would suffer as Lear has and might then pity her father's state. The play continues to explore the relationship between elemental invasion and compassion as Lear rages against the storm and later admits that he cannot perceive its sensational magnitude. Although Lear recognizes the plight of "poor naked wretches.../ That bide the pelting of this pitiless night" (11.25-26) as well as the value in "expos[ing] thyself to feel what wretches feel" (11.30)—pointing again to a correspondence between the elements and feelings of pity—as the scene progresses, we see that Lear's ability to engage in the imaginative act of empathetic identification is severely limited (11.25). Although Lear's capacity for fellow feeling appears indeterminate, I seize briefly on two images of hybridity and compassion: first, Edgar's sylvan attire and the solace he finds in acknowledging the pain of others, and finally, Lear's weed-strewn crown and his desire to live out his days with his youngest daughter. I end by probing the relationship between hybridity and compassion and the extent to which nature's hidden sympathies have prepared Lear to, with Cordelia, "sing like birds" and "take upon's the mystery of things" (24.9, 16).

Laurel Billings  
SAA Abstract  
2.10.20

When Goths were Goths and Tamora was queen: Race, Revenge, and Sacrifice in *Titus Andronicus*

Displacement  
Remainder

This paper delineates three kinds of “marking” in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*: the marking of Tamora’s son to be killed in the ritual sacrifice; the “spotting” of Tamora’s honor through her intimacy with her slave; and the birth of the bastard son whose dark skin marks his parents’ adultery. Maintaining that all three constitute forms of racial marking, I employ the concept of abjection, as well as deferral, substitution, and infiltration, to analyze the processes through which these marks become legible, certain, and inevitable. Reading the tales from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as sites where struggles to establish group identity are articulated as claims to literary and cultural inheritance, I argue that Aaron’s infiltration and “wild” manipulation of these tales—a process that ultimately turns the Roman characters into animals that fight each other to the death—positions him as the *reason* behind the racial marking of other characters.

Shakespeare and Ecological Catastrophe

SAA Abstract: Ecologies and/of Resistance

Walter Cohen

Keywords: catastrophe, nonrepresentation

Anthropogenic global warming has initiated the 6<sup>th</sup> major extinction, the first since the demise of the dinosaurs. These extinctions provide a metaphor for the dire effects of ecological *catastrophes* of the past 5000 years, disasters that have had a major impact on literary history—not as sufficient causes but as conditions of possibility. The *catastrophes* considered here are the Black Death, the Great Dying (the Native American genocide), and the Little Ice Age, in their interrelationships. The literary response to these cataclysms takes two forms—direct representation and, more crucially but also more problematically, *nonrepresentation*. I will briefly illustrate the former by the storm scenes in *King Lear*, as well as by other, similar moments in Shakespeare's plays. The latter, by definition, cannot be illustrated. Instead, I will present arguments and evidence in support of the thesis that environmental catastrophe helps enable major changes in literature, theater, and society, whether or not those changes reveal any clear signs of their significant ecological indebtedness. Instances of the *nonrepresentational* legacy of environmental disaster include the revival of the Classics at the macro level and elements of *The Tempest* at the micro. Similarly, in society and theater alike, we find acts of resistance that are self-consciously connected to environmental calamity (*King Lear* again) but also those that are not (*The Tempest* again).

Causal arguments are unpopular in literary and theatrical study—wrongly, in my view. Hence, this argument makes causal arguments, albeit of a particular kind. The conclusion then presents possible objections to the approach adopted here, as well as a partial defense.

## Abstract

"As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin":

Fantasies of Omnipotence and Autonomy in Coriolanus and Trump

Evelyn Gajowski

"Ecologies and/of Resistance" Research Seminar

Shakespeare Association of America, Denver, CO, 15-18 Apr. 2020

My paper will explore the implications for Shakespeare's texts of two contrasting theoretical concepts key to contemporary ecofeminist studies: Stacy Alaimo's *transcorporeality* and Val Plumwood's *hyper-separation*. Drawing on Rebecca Laroche's and Jennifer Munroe's reading, I'll suggest the ways in which King Lear exemplifies *transcorporeality* before exploring more fully the significant resonances between two figures -- Coriolanus and Trump -- and how they exemplify *hyper-separation*. Resistance to various external forces defines both; for each, the survival of the "self" depends upon combating these forces. The identity formation of each is impenetrable and solitary; in the case of Trump, moreover, he projects these traits onto the state (going so far as to imagine himself as one with the state), hawking a fantasy that it is not only protected by the Atlantic Ocean on its eastern border and the Pacific Ocean on its western border but is also walled off from its neighboring nations on its southern border. The identity formation of each male is based on an exaggerated sense of "self" that is primarily concerned with delineating the "self" from external forces. Violence and wrath police the boundaries of the "self" with the intent of defining the "self," constantly, as "not other" -- as patrician rather than plebian; as Roman rather than Volscian; as male rather than female; as rich rather than poor; as US citizen rather than non-US citizen; as Christian rather than Muslim; as Anglo rather than

Hispanic; as white rather than black -- and, indeed, as human rather than non-human. "Others" function as objects of detestation or conquest. Their lives, moreover, are characterized by solitary combat, militarily or politically. Both are in the thrall of fantasies of absolute omnipotence and independence. Along the way, I hope to explore how the corn riots in *Coriolanus*, the Midlands Revolt in early modern England, and asylum seekers on the US southern border constitute one another in mutually illuminating ways.

Proposal for SAA 2020 Seminar, “Ecologies and/of Resistance”  
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“Bring Forth Answerable Fruit”: Margaret Cavendish, Mary Cary, and Anne Trapnel on the  
Exploitation of Nature in Seventeenth-Century England

Kailey Giordano

While scholarship on Margaret Cavendish has gained popularity of late, the writings of Mary Cary and Anne Trapnel have been understudied, and the scholarship that deals with seventeenth-century women writers largely focuses on the ways in which they conceptualize female authorship and subject-hood. In this paper, I will demonstrate the ways in which these women writers were actively engaged in seventeenth-century discourse about what humankind’s relationship to nature should be. More specifically, I will examine the concerns that Cavendish, Cary, and Trapnel raise in their utopian writings—*The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* (1666); *A New and More Exact Mapped* (1651); and *The Cry of a Stone* (1654) respectively—about humankind’s increasingly exploitative relationship to nature in seventeenth-century England. In short, I will argue that Cavendish’s, Cary’s, and Trapnel’s texts demonstrate a deep concern about the ways in which emergent forms of capitalism, the English Civil War, and the practices of the Royal Society significantly intensified the exploitation and destruction of land in seventeenth-century England. In turn, these women’s utopian writings craft an ecological sensibility grounded in empathy, mercy, and care that worked to challenge this increasingly exploitative relationship to nature.

**Two words:** nature, utopia

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“Ecologies and/of Resistance”

### **Smokescreens: Staging Air Pollution in Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist***

Early modern London had a serious problem with air pollution. Over the course of the sixteenth century, severe timber shortages led to an increase in the consumption of coal, considered to be a cheaper alternative fuel. Air pollution posed significant representational challenges (as Ken Hiltner has argued); nevertheless, playwrights increasingly alluded to London’s growing reliance on this fossil fuel, even burning coal onstage to produce many of the special effects that drew spectators to the theaters.

This paper will examine how Ben Jonson responded to the ubiquity of coal smoke by placing coal in the hands of his most infamous urban rogues, or con artists. Focusing on *The Alchemist* (1610), I will trace how Face, Doll and Subtle repeatedly use coal as a “smokescreen” – a disguise, illusion or distracting special effect – that functions to trick other Londoners out of more valuable resources. This smokescreen takes two forms. The rogues manufacture a smoky explosion near the end of the play to distract their clients. And Face and Subtle blacken themselves with coal and soot to make their alchemical operation appear more credible. Although the staining effects of coal smoke are perceived as temporary and artificial – nothing more than elaborate stagecraft – coal smoke gradually saturates the world of the play (and the playhouse) with real material consequences. It contributes to the rogue’s denigration and to Subtle’s eventual ejection from the city. Thus, even though Jonson’s rogues burn coal in an attempt to get ahead, *The Alchemist* ultimately suggests that the resulting pollution more often reinforces class positions, even in the constantly changing city.

While this paper will focus on how the blackening effects of coal smoke reinforce class difference, I will also consider how these smokescreens might be intertwined with other representations of blackness in the period, including those of black-skinned Africans. Drawing on scholarship of early modern race and the contemporary environmental justice movement, I hope to conclude with a section on how the repetition of smokescreens on stage forged associations between blackness and pollution that were gradually racialized and which persist in some discourses surrounding environmental degradation today.

Keywords: Urban (Ecologies), Smokescreens (Resistance)



Jan Olesen

*Things  
refused to name themselves; refused  
to let him name them.*

Margret Atwood “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer”

### The Semblance of Nature: Contingency and order in Early Modern Cultures of Collection

In constructing *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* for the Royal Society, Nehemiah Grew claims to depart from conventional methods of order and methodology. While he is interested in external, and accurate, descriptions of the natural world, he claims to be the first to attempt to describe “how largely and usefully . . . the Inner” qualities of things are. To accommodate this Grew’s text follows a narrative structure, and he argues that the narrative should be constructed by resemblances rather than any other previous structure. As such, Grew tacitly suggests how things are interconnected (sympoietic), and isolated. I will argue that Grew’s text asserts an ambivalent desire to understand the material world as instrumental and objective, one that feeds what Jane Bennett suggests calls the “earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption,” while tacitly understanding how objective knowledge is contingent. Conquest and consumption, for Anna Tsing, produce a remainder, something salvaged. And what is salvaged is what is left over after the colonizing and civilizing force sees nothing left to conquer or consume. What emerges, for Tsing, is a new, savage economy and ecology of being. In a more sinister way, Donna Harroway suggests the Chthulucene is the response to the the Anthropocene, where savage nature speaks back to civilizing humanity. W.J.T Mitchell distinguishes things from objects suggesting that an object is something perceived by the subject, where the thing is the when the object looks back at the subject. By constructing a narrative driven catalogue, and asserting that order should be a connection of semblances, Grew’s text includes things and objects, a text that anticipates objective scientific categorization of the future, and reflects upon cabinets of curiosities and the cult of relics of the past.

Ecology Keyword: Sympoiesis

Resistance Keyword: Savage/Salvage

Rebecca Quoss-Moore

Politicized Ecologies of a Fertile Eden-England

John of Gaunt's famous homage to England in *Richard II* begins with seventeen subjects. The sentence breeds subjects, like the England Gaunt imagines; the images are fecund, multiplying and sometimes self-replicating in a series that mirrors the imagined bounty of England and of her ideal rulers. The metaphoric fertility of Gaunt's speech on England magnifies the complicity of Richard and the Queen in misunderstanding and misusing the royal body's relationship to the fertile land-body of England. England is the garden, the garden is the womb, and the Queen is garden and womb both. But in Richard's and the Queen's fatal misunderstandings of the purpose of the garden, the Queen becomes an empty womb, a barren garden, and so incompatible with English fruitfulness and bounty. While condemning of the character, though, this reading emphasizes the centrality of a queen figure to a constructive and growing England. A queen who understands England as a flourishing garden is necessary to the proper function of the kingdom. It is not, ultimately, the Queen's barrenness—which Shakespeare's monarch shared—that leaves her unfit, unnamed, and uncrowned; it is her misunderstanding of barrenness as a weapon and as a function she can force upon the land. The Queen does imagine an Edenic paradise as a parallel to England, but she imagines Eden primarily as the site of the Fall; to be an Eden is to be a space of human sin. Gaunt's Eden is instead a demi-paradise: the nearest thing on Earth or of Earthly things to heaven and a garden in which things grow in their "truest" or more natural state. Though strains of resistance and normativity in gender performance are also relevant, here, the relationship of ruler and land becomes the most central question of Gaunt's, Richard's, and the Queen's ecological vocabulary.

My two words: Barren Edens

Ashley Sarpong

SAA Abstract: Ecologies and/of Resistance

Land, History and the Stuff of National Fiction in Shakespeare's *Richard II*

Two words: land, identity

This essay seeks to explore the connection between discursive practices of land tenure and the representations of real and potential national identity and monarchical power in William Shakespeare's *Richard II*. In this essay, I hope to contrast how the text imagines Richard as sovereign and England as nation to the text's anxious representations of Richard and the land(s) he controls as merely land tenure obligations. These two frames of tying Richard to his land—as ruler over nation and landlord over land tenure—transpose fantasies of discrete and anointed monarchical power onto tenuous legal rights that provide a feudal framework for the transference of power and identity through kinship. I will argue that the dyad pairing the real monarch and the frail overseer draws upon the text's preoccupation with land tenure that recent scholars have identified, as well as the text's sustained treatment of England's ecology (e.g. England-as-Garden, England-as-sceptered island, England-as-malignant earth). This essay responds to both current scholarship on *Richard II* and to current political concerns with fair land use voiced by often-underrepresented indigenous groups resisting the calamitous effects of oil extraction. In the case of the latter, according to Michael Watts' essay "Petro-Violence," articulations of community, singular ethnic identity/nationhood and a spatial boundedness to the land have proved central to indigenous groups' protests of oil extraction policies. This paper hopes to

demonstrate that the political questions of community, nationhood and geography that arise from current concerns about the economic use of land inflect, enforce and impel a reading of *Richard II* that crystallizes the parallel figurations of Richard as a sovereign and a landlord that work together to mobilize feudal and early modern concerns about land rights and the potential for power and communal identity formation to speak to the ecological crises of our time.

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“Keep[ing] Time Well’: Intersections of Time, Agency, and Community in *The Roaring Girl*.”

Courtney Naum Scuro

Typically classifying it as one in a string of city-comedies popular in the first decades of the seventeenth century, scholars have tended to overlook the many natural entanglements which nevertheless impact the cast of characters roving London’s bustling urban streets in Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl* (1611). First described as a “creature...nature hath brought forth,” the gender-bending queer corporeal presentation performed by the play’s titular character, “roaring girl” Moll Cutpurse, in particular works to foreground nature’s influential place operating within the space of the city. Especially through her relations to time and to timekeeping, Moll’s nature activates an alternative social ecology of mutual exchange, influence, and becoming to counter the impositional formations dictated by the prevailing patriarchal order. For Moll, “keep[ing] time well” has moral implications and operates through a dynamic entanglement of nature-timepiece-bodies. Defying binaries like nature/technology and city/country, Moll’s time-sense also complicates our current critical understandings concerning the impact of mechanized time-practices on early modern temporal experience. Ultimately, in this essay, I argue that through Moll and this play’s repeated, albeit brief, horological allusions, Dekker and Middleton explore the nature of/nature in time and in doing so, engage early modern anxieties around the powerful role one’s sense of time can play in shaping the nature of life in the city.

**Two Words:** queering networks

Will Steffen

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SAA 2020

Seminar: Ecologies and/of Resistance

Paper Title: "The unkindest tied that ever any man tied": Hemp, Tobacco, Fire, and Race on the Early Modern Stage

Abstract:

As economic and colonial expansion in the early modern period granted the English access to more commodities of foreign provenance, suspicions flourished about the impact that new commodities might have on consumers. For example, anti-tobacconist discourse emphasized a potential consequence of smoking New World tobacco: that it would turn a familiar, white English body into something alien, black, and Other. But archaeologists have shown how the word "tobacco" functioned as an umbrella term for a variety of inhalants during the period, including psychoactive cannabis. Though the English learned to smoke tobacco from Americans, African populations had been smoking psychoactive cannabis from pipes for centuries. Both industrial and psychoactive strains of cannabis grew in England, but the English began importing industrial hemp from Russia to expand their navy under Elizabeth. But how were industrial and psychoactive hemp—and tobacco—conflated during this period, and what anxieties did the English associate with hemp? Furthermore, how was hemp represented on the English stage? In both Shakespeare's *Two Gentleman of Verona* (ca. 1590) and Daborne's *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (1610), the proximity of a ladder of ropes (presumably made of hemp) and fire activates an anxiety about changing into something Other, and seems to extend the logic of anti-tobacconist discourse. In this paper, I want to suggest that these ladder scenes stage the risks and rewards of investing in and consuming commodities of foreign provenance. I suggest that hemp is embroiled in a discourse that on the one hand resists globalization, but that ultimately contributes to the production of an early racial logic on the other. This discourse suggests that inhaling foreign commodities can turn English subjects into abject others, but that an expanded navy sailing on the "tide" may eventually profit off of such abject otherness, or what Launcelot refers to as "the unkindest tied that ever any man tied" (2.3.39-40).

Two words: Tide, tied

SAA 2020

Seminar: Ecologies and/of Resistance

Abstract for Jeff Theis

Title: Within and Without: Dwelling and Ecological Resistance in Shakespeare

Dwelling, as an ecological act, is of critical concern today as well as to those living in early modern England. The process of building and maintaining the early modern home provides a small-scale approach to the larger challenge people face of dwelling within the world that presents historical antecedents to our current climate crisis predicament. To what extent is the architecture and oikos/ecology of the home something that is separate from the ecologies of what lies without the home, a veritable bubble predicated upon distinguishing between what is within and what is without? Building practices that increased housing size, comfort, and privacy spatially also distance those dwelling within from the environment without. These changing practices grew out of changing social structures as well as in response to the early moderns' own climate challenge—The Little Ice Age. For the seminar, I propose to examine attempts to dwell within Shakespeare's plays. By focusing on the activity of dwelling from an ecological perspective, acts of resistance will be seen within the context of adaptation and accommodation both to the environment and to animals and humans within these ecosystems. Resistance, from this perspective, is an activity not only of protest, but it can also be an act of defining what lies outside of the dwelling (dwelling as structure and as activity). Resistance, then, can be a protest against ecological and social injustice, but it also can be a dangerous rejection of one's place within an ecological framework that supersedes social frameworks. Plays to be examined might include *Cymbeline*, *King Lear*, and *Timon of Athens*.

Words:

Ecologies: Within

Resistance: Without