

SAA 2021: Ecomigration: Shakespeare and the Contemporary Novel  
Seminar Organizer: Sharon O'Dair, University of Alabama  
Abstracts.

**Walter Cohen**  
**University of Michigan**  
**SAA 2021**

### Historical Novel (and other genres) of Early Modern World (1450-1700)

#### Key issues

- a. History/temporality
  - i. Renaissance vs. other periods as object of historical representation. Do you get anything different from delimiting the historical novels under scrutiny to the early modern period—i.e. anything different from historical novels about other periods? This question asks us to compare the historical novels in this study grouping to historical novels about Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the 18<sup>th</sup>-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - ii. Different periods in which accounts of Renaissance are composed. Do you get anything different from delimiting the historical novels under scrutiny to the early modern period—i.e. anything different from seeing realism-modernism-postmodernism as successive forms of the historical novel? This question asks us to compare the historical novels in this grouping to each other along the historical/formalist lines of the three obvious periods of the historical novel. It uses Perry Anderson's 2011 survey of the historical novel as a baseline for comparison.
  - iii. Composite account of the era? What if you keep the different times when the novels were written, the different genres (realism-modernism-postmodernism), the different languages in which they're written, and the different places and events they treat all in the background? Instead, we ask: what do we get from reading these novels as a composite account of the era? Is it different from what we get from a more familiar history of the historical novel (Lukács-Anderson) and/or from the current state of historiography of the period? How is it inflected by early modern writers themselves—above all Shakespeare?
- b. Discourse/genre
  - i. Novel vs other literary forms
  - ii. Literary vs historical accounts of early modernity
- c. Geography/languages/literary traditions
  - i. How do these differ from one another?
  - ii. Writing about one's own past, yours and someone else's, or someone else's

Texts already read [= different genre]

1. [Shakespeare and Fletcher, *Henry VIII*, 1613]
2. [Racine, *Bazajet*, 1672]
3. [Chikamatsu, *Battles of Coxinga*, 1715]
4. Kleist, *Michael Kohlhaus* (1810)
5. Scott, *Kenilworth* (1821)
6. Pushkin, *The Moor of Peter the Great* (1828)
7. Manzoni, *The Betrothed* (1829)
8. Gogol. *Taras Bulba* (1842)
9. Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)
10. Eliot, *Romola* (1862-3)
11. [Browning, "Caliban upon Setebos," 1864]
12. Asch, Sholem, *Kiddush ha-Shem* (1919)
13. Woolf, *Orlando* (1928)
14. [Brecht, *Mother Courage*, 1939]
15. Lewis, Janet. *The Wife of Martin Guerre* (1941)
16. Andrić, Ivo. *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945)
17. John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960)
18. Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *The Slave* (1962)
19. Endō, Shūsaku, *Silence* (1966)
20. Fuentes, *Terra Nostra* (1975)
21. Pamuk, *My Name Is Red* (1998)
22. Brooks, Geraldine, *Year of Wonders* (2001), *People of the Book* (2008), *Caleb's Crossing* (2010)
23. Morrison, *A Mercy* (2008)
24. Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008)
25. Saramago, *The Elephant's Journey* (2008)
26. Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (2009), *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), *The Mirror and the Light* (2020)
27. Kehlmann, Daniel, *Tyll* (2017)

### Texts to read

- A. Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722)
- B. Hugo, *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831)
- C. Dumas, *The Three Musketeers* (1844)
- D. Mann, Heinrich, *Henry IV* (1935, 1938)
- E. Prescott, HFM, *The Man on a Donkey* (1952)
- F. [Bolt, Robert, *A Man for All Seasons*, 1962]
- G. Yourcenar, Marguerite *The Abyss* (1968)
- H. Grass. *The Meeting at Telgte* (1981)
- I. Condé, *I, Tituba* (1986)
- J. Vollmann, William, *Fathers and Crows* (1992)
- K. Eco, Umberto. *The Island of the Day Before* (1994)
- L. Blissett, Luther/ Wu Ming, *Q* (1999), or *Altai* (2005)
- M. Esterhazy, Peter. *Celestial Harmonies* (2000)

- N. Updike, *Gertrude and Claudius* (2000)  
O. Chevalier, Tracy, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2012)  
P. Lalami, Laila. *The Moor's Account* (2014)

**Chuck Conaway**  
**University of Southern Indiana**  
**SAA 2021**

“A Progeny of Evils: Shakespeare and Primitive God Constructs”

In Marjorie B. Kellogg's novel, *Lear's Daughters*, a team of scientists, funded by corporate interests, travels to a subgiant star system in order to investigate a terrestrial planet recently discovered by a deep space probe. The planet is of particular interest because the presence of light metals was detected by the probe in the planet's volcanic terrain. The mission's corporate sponsor is hoping to find a rich vein of lithium it can mine in order to develop the solar collector it claims will be the salvation of an Earth already in the midst of ecological wrack and ruin. The new planet itself, however, is plagued by meteorological chaos. The indigenous race of Sawls believes that the planet's disorderly climate is caused by sister Goddesses who use the natural elements of fire and water to wage war upon one another. The mission's anthropologist argues that the Sawlian mythology falls in line exactly with “the sort of god constructs that primitives have always invented to explain natural phenomena” (113).

The front matter of Kellogg's novel includes a dedication to William Shakespeare as well as an epigraph from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – Titania's lines indicating how the “debate” and “dissension” between her and Oberon have produced a “progeny of evils” in the natural world (3.2.116 and 115). Additional epigraphs in section subheadings borrow from *King Lear*, and fairly early in the novel, when the mission's linguist programs a translator to interpret a song accompanying a ritual Dance of Origins, we learn that the warring goddesses of Sawlian mythology sound a bit like Shakespeare's Goneril and Regan. The parallels to Shakespeare are not exact, but the goddesses are the daughters of an old king who “*divided the land among his three children. . . . Though the middle child was weakest, she was much loved by the king, and the king charged her stronger siblings (sisters) with her protection. . . . But when the king died . . . the world fell into strife*” (162).

This paper will explore Kellogg's references to Shakespeare in her presentation of a fictional mythology of a divine but destructive agency in planetary climate change – a mythology that is contested by skepticism, such as that expressed by the anthropologist, and complicated by the gradual revelation of a Sawlian cultural history that was and perhaps is significantly more sophisticated than primitive.

**Ryan Day**  
**St. Louis University**  
**Madrid, Spain**  
**SAA 2021**

Marching over Bodies: *Macbeth*, *the Overstory*, and the Human Holobiont (title very tentative)

Richard Powers' *The Overstory* is fundamentally a story about migration. Three of the characters' paths to activism are explicitly rooted in stories of immigration as they unfold across generations, while the rest see characters moving across the country or the world, often motivated to do so by an interaction with trees. Of course, the trees migrate too, often with the help of some unwitting human agent. Powers invokes Ovid, Milton, Walt Whitman, and others along the way, but he gives special attention to Shakespeare and particularly *Macbeth*. The marching of Birnam wood, at once a symbol of nature's agency and a refutation of the supernatural, firmly roots the pagan-infused illusion of a pantheistic nature in the mundane human discipline of military strategy. The mystery, ultimately, does not lie in the marching of the wood itself, but in the curious ability of the weird sisters to predict that nature will be manipulated in a way that offers the appearance of the supernatural. The very prediction alludes to something beyond nature as we know it empirically; however, the witches provide what is a decidedly anthropomorphic supernatural, one that allows us to glimpse an agency that moves beyond the human, while remaining rooted in the comforting home of the human body. They are both familiar and strange, both human and more than human. The whole of the mystery created by the witches' predictions, and the all too worldly mechanisms that lead to the seeming magic of a marching forest, is an uncanny example of what we have come to call nature-cultures. It is not surprising then, that 400 years later, on the other side of the enlightenment, Richard Powers returns to just this scene from Shakespeare's play as he constructs a text dedicated to the complex and unwieldy juncture of human agency as it migrates across the human superorganism which Wendy Wheeler has called "the whole creature."

The paper I propose is a work of narrative scholarship and ecocriticism in which I will weave analysis of the two primary texts with critical analysis and the narrative of my own pandemic-inspired move to a national park in the mountains outside of Madrid. We now live at the base of a mountain known as *La Peñota*, which is covered in a massive pine forest and home to a tree known as *el pino soitario*, or the "lone pine" which may be the largest pine tree in Spain and is visible from my two-year-old's bedroom window. Our family, already an immigrant family in Madrid, is even more evidently different here in the small mountain town. I will discuss both the human holobiont—which includes the bacteria and viruses that call us home—and the holobiont of the pines, which includes the massive fungal networks that connect their root systems into the superorganism of the forest, in conjunction with the story of our own connection to the landscape and efforts to assimilate.

Lowell Duckert  
University of Delaware  
SAA 2021

## Migration's Tumble

If [Tyre] did not exist, if there were only kelch grass  
and stone pines and spider crabs and black-backed  
gulls and the perpetual, unwitnessed accounting of  
the waves, would the world be richer or poorer?

--*The Porpoise* (2019, 199)

. . . to seas,

Where when men been there's seldom ease.

--*Pericles* (1607-8, 2.0.27-8)

There are multiple kinds of migrations to be found in Mark Haddon's *The Porpoise*: involving plague, arterial plaque, souls, storm clouds, and, of course, the Apollonius story itself. At the start of the novel's surreal time-travel scene – in which the main character, Darius, slowly morphs into Pericles – he and his three nautical friends aboard *The Porpoise* discover life-filled waters south of England. “[S]omething,” they sense, “is very wrong. There is no weird uptick in the weather, no alteration in sea currents which can feasibly explain this fecundity” (70). What interests me here is not so much the disorienting blending of narratives than the shock of ecological resurgence: only by going *back* in time are the characters able to experience this flourishing. Following the novel's temporal migrations between past and present, this paper asks *why* and *when* it is strange to encounter aquatic richness—an abundance that simply *should not be*. The play's maritime themes are well documented in the blue humanities: from the indistinct human (“half fish, half flesh”), to fishing (“wat’ry empire”), to political portents (“the belching whale”). It is also tempting to read the play nostalgically, visiting a time before English merchants forever tarnished the world's whale roads. (The Muscovy Company set to work in Spitsbergen in 1611.) I argue that the enfolding of *Pericles-The Porpoise* helps us think about historical as well as ongoing alterations of sea creatures' migratory routes—both humans' enmeshment in, and responsibility for, those changes. Read in tandem, are we encouraged to lament an pelagic era untouched by human rapacity? Or are we spurred to take a misanthropic turn, as Darius/Pericles eventually does (see above)? How does Haddon's repurposing of the story emphasize the prolongation – and heightened pronouncement – of oceanic stress? What, if any, is this romance's relation to marine repletion/replenishment? The porpoise's “bounc[ing] and tumb[ing]” (2.2.25) motion, I wager, offers us a model for reengaging the rise and fall of multidirectional, multispecies movements right now.

**Ben Fuqua**  
**Clemson University**  
**SAA 2021**

### Kill Your Shakespeares and Start Again: Auratic Literatures, Loss, and Eco-Migration

A month into the pandemic, watching that early chaos unfold, Levi Bryant mused that he felt as if he had lost Kant's "'transcendental unity of apperception,' that formal 'I think' that is supposed to accompany all of [his] representations." Disjointed from normalcy all of our processes—how we move around our space, how we acquire and store food, how we manage our health, how we think, how we teach—become diffuse. In science fiction as well as recent science fact, Shakespeare becomes a tool for recentering subjectivity much as it was used as a tool to ship Eurocentric "values" to the new world during settler colonialism. Shakespeare is a portable self, at least for a certain kind of subjectivity. In the face of retreat or even forced dislocation, Shakespeare may be used to reintegrate or redistribute normalcy. I know I have done some version of that redistribution over the past nine months. My paper itself will look at Margaret Atwood's *Hag-seed* (2016) and Neal Stephenson's *Fall; or Dodge in Hell* (2019), focusing on two very different representations of retreat from disaster or personal loss into not just Shakespeare's plots, themes, or characters, but a world centered in some idea of what a literary Shakespeare should be, how we should think and produce "representations" using Shakespeare. Each uses Shakespeare as an escape, either from a crumbling personal life, environmental disaster, or the problem of existence writ large. I would like to explore the value of that escape, even if it only instructs us *via negativa*.

**Stephen O'Neill,**  
**Maynooth University, Ireland**  
**SAA 2021**

### Shakespearean eco-echoes in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

Shakespeare is our eco-contemporary, argues Randall Martin, in a pronouncement that invites us to find in Shakespeare's plays not only representations of climate and nature but, more fundamentally, a mode of thinking about the full range of objects, human and non-human, that comprise our ecosystem. Modern adaptations or echoes of Shakespeare would seem a productive place to amplify Shakespeare's potential responsiveness to anthropogenic climate change (Goodbody and Johns-Putra), although as Amitav Ghosh has argued in *The Great Derangement*, the novel form has yet to prove fully responsive to the climate reality around us and has even seemed resistant to exploring it. Other work on the eco-novel or "cli-fi" invites us to qualify Ghosh's pronouncement, however: climate change has altered the novel form itself (Trexler) or demanded a rehistoricising into an "ecological template" (Sjon). Ghosh's own novel *Gun Island* seeks to redress this inattention and / or resistance. It confronts climate change through a combination of pre-modern stories, in particular the Bengali legend of the snake Goddess Manasa Devi whom the Gun merchant must escape from; elements of magic realism; and all too familiar examples of eco-catastrophe (people displaced and seeking refuge; forest fires in LA; rising water levels in Venice; migrating whales beaching themselves). It confronts migration too,

establishing it as the most natural of phenomenon in humans and animals alike, in ways that reject contemporary phobic discourses within populism and resurgent nationalisms around refugees and migrants. It does not, however, contain much Shakespeare: there are only a few passing references to *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* in the context of the history of Venice, since the character of Cinta is a noted historian of the city. As such, Ghosh's novel is not quite an example of the Shakespeare eco-migration novel. But in a novel that forges and then validates chance connections between its characters, as well as linking past to present and legend to reality, the reader is prompted to identify further connections. On the one hand, I argue that *Gun Island* offers a potential indirect Shakespearean intertextuality in which the two plays set in Venice bring to the novel's empathetic focus on the migrant a long historical perspective: Othello and Shylock become echoes or ghosts in this eco-novel's network of stories, locations and beings. On the other, I suggest that the very indirectness of the novel's Shakespeare, who appears through its interest in Venice, confronts us with the possibility that Shakespeare, even in its adapted, modernised iterations, is not as conducive to climate awareness or to Anthropocene anxieties as eco-critics like Randall have claimed. But then again, a climate crisis, which is also a cultural crisis, is not the time to be Shakespearecentric.

#### References:

Ghosh, *Gun Island*

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Great Derangement*

Sjon, "On the Organic Diversity of Literature"

Goodbody and Johns-Putra, ed. *Cli-Fi*

Trexler, *Anthropocene Fiction: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015).

**Jeff Theis**

**Salem State University**

**SAA 2021**

"No Island for Old Men: Atwood's *Hag-Seed*, Dwelling, and Prospero's Non-Migration"

In adapting *The Tempest*, Margaret Atwood makes a number of changes to place and environment that raise provocative questions when seen through the prism of ecomigration. Perhaps the most notable change is that the migration is vastly shortened, comically so as Felix (the Prospero character) only moves a few miles outside of town where the Makeshiweg Theatre Festival is based. Much of the diminishment in geographic scale enhances the humor and pathos of Felix and the theatrical world. In terms of ecomigration and our climate crisis, however, keeping Felix local allows Atwood to interrogate whether ecomigration in developed, capitalist Canada is even possible. I will especially focus on what happens when the sparsely populated island in *The Tempest* is supplanted by two primary locations: the quasi-cave-cabin on a family's backyard and the prison where Felix enacts his revenge plot. The post-colonialist time and setting calls into question whether we can really dwell in this human-modified world where nature is minimized to a backyard "cave" and erased by the concrete and steel of a prison. Thus, as Atwood diminishes the environmental scale and Prospero's grandiosity, she offers a bleak view on the possibility of escape to the natural world and forces us to confront the abuses of power that create the industrial prison complex.