

## Seminar 41, Shakespearean Natures

**Co-organizers: Gretchen Minton (Montana State University) and Peter Remien (Lewis-Clark State College)**

### Abstracts:

**Erin Ellerbeck (University of Victoria)**

#### **“Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and the Cultivated Woodland”**

Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is frequently noted for its portrayal of a deer hunt, in which the Princess acknowledges the vainglory of sport. As Edward Berry observes, the scene links human and animal suffering, suggesting a shared bond between the hunter and the hunted.<sup>1</sup> Less commonly observed, however, is the scene’s emphasis on the links among people and plants. The Forester’s first words to the Princess as she prepares to meet the deer equate her with the product of horticultural intervention: “Hereby, upon the edge of yonder coppice, / A stand where you may make the fairest shoot” (4.1.9-10). The Forester indicates the place (a deer stand) from which the Princess might take the best shot, but in the process he also praises her as the loveliest of the many offshoots that sprout from the altered tree stumps of the managed woodland. Coppicing, the silvicultural technique that results in the production of a coppice, is a sustainable practice: trees are cut down so that they will regrow in ways that are deemed more productive. While the conclusion of the hunt is final, the outcome of coppicing is unbounded; the deadly outcome of the shot highlights the new life of the shoot.

This essay will propose that the comparison of the Princess to a cultivated tree encapsulates the play’s broader tendency to consider human behaviour in botanical terms, whether positively or negatively. Appropriating the language of horticulture, Shakespeare’s characters conceptualize their world in terms of human control and potential. I will demonstrate that the polysemy of horticultural metaphors in the play indicates that critical attention to the tropology of cultivation can illuminate early modern understandings of human and botanical categories.

**Claire Hansen (Australian National University)**

#### **“Blue spatial imaginaries in Shakespeare”**

The oceanic sites of reef, seafloor, and shipwreck recur throughout the works of William Shakespeare. While often manifested through magic, dreamscape or metaphor, the resonance of these aquatic sites of nature may alter for audiences and readers for whom the interstitial gap between lived and literary locations, real and imaginary place, is closer. Using a blue humanities framework, this essay investigates the entanglements between the real and the imagined blue ‘natures’ of *The Tempest*, *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, drawing on theories of place and ecocriticism to interrogate what Edward Soja calls the ‘real-and-imagined’. I will explore how three natural oceanic sites (reef, coral, seafloor) operate as spatial imaginaries and productively

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study*. Cambridge UP, 2001. 68.

entangle the experiential and material blue with its imagined, literary and dramatic manifestations. In interweaving a twenty-first-century lived experience of these aquatic sites with early modern literary and dramatic depictions, this work is founded on a presentist framework, which recognises that 'the present can't be drained out of our experience' and so our own 'situatedness' as critics cannot 'contaminate the past'. The questions I ask of Shakespeare's blue spatial imaginaries are shaped by the ecocritical concerns of today's era. The paper uses theories of place to generate a spatial model for real-and-imagined blue natures in Shakespeare studies.

**Erin K. Kelly (California State University, Chico)**

**"Human Nature, Animal Nature: Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Cowdray Entertainment (1591)"**

Hunting is a particularly fraught and complex form of human activity that has been analyzed by anthropologists as essential to our understanding of human nature and its evolution. The ultimate goal of the encounter between hunter and hunted is death. Nonetheless, in aristocratic early modern venery, the human hunter must rely on the speed, strength, and superior senses of his horses and dogs. The very activity that allows the aristocratic hunter to demonstrate his dominance over the natural world and social order also requires him (usually him) to rely on the services of his lowerclass huntsmen and to effect what amounts to a human-animal hybrid of man-horse-dog. William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* prominently features two kinds of aristocratic hunting: bow and stable and coursing. Throughout the play, Shakespeare plays with the convention of the hunt as love chase, using the language and procedures of the pastime to comment on the relationships between the four pairs of lovers. Through an examination of these moments, I will argue that hunting and/as love are presented as both a domination of one species by another and as a loss of boundaries between species. In addition, my paper also prompts questions about how humans use nature to understand human nature, for there are no real encounters with animals or nature in this play. Instead, animals are the subject of conversation and wordplay. Behind those words, however, lie real (dead) animals. To bring the question of what constitutes an encounter with nature into focus, I will read *Love's Labour's Lost* alongside the two printed accounts of Queen Elizabeth's visit to Cowdray, the estate of Anthony Browne, Viscount Montague, in 1591. During this visit, Elizabeth engaged in the same kind of hunting that is depicted in Shakespeare's play and the hunting was the occasion for Petrarchan praise of the queen; unlike in the play, real deer were killed in these hunts. My paper will analyze how a tense encounter between a queen and a powerful subject whose loyalty was in question, an encounter represented in two, competing printed accounts, can help us read Shakespeare's play in new ways.

**Randall Martin (University of New Brunswick)**

**"The Rivers and Trees Speak: Anthropocene Cartography and Ecological Semiotics in *Henry IV Part One*"**

This paper is part of a larger project that rethinks the epistemological breakthroughs of the 1980s and 90s' "new cartography" from ecocritical perspectives. It relates Hotspur's and Glendower's fictional dispute over a map of England and the former's proposed diversion of the River Trent in

*Henry IV Part One* to Christopher Saxton's 1579 "national" atlas to explore how the characters' opposing attitudes towards the natural world invite audiences to decode environmentally meaningful signs in Saxton's and later English cartography.

Shakespeare's invented confrontation purposefully gives voice to clashing economic and ecological values which Saxton's maps complexly foregrounded or suppressed. On the one hand, Saxton's cartographic signs selectively represented England's physical potential for exploitation and commodification. On the other, public protests against privatizing enclosure and "improvement" schemes such as river diversions gave Shakespeare -- rural landlord and London tenant -- and his audiences the contextual knowledge to discern environmental meanings from Saxton's stylized depictions. The imaginative effect of Glendower's (temporary) opposition in the broader context of *I Henry IV's* personal and political tragedies -- including Hotspur's cut-off proposal -- is to imagine less human-centric and more ecologically equitable and sustainable stewardship of local and regional environments.

In the room available in this paper, I shall identify how Shakespeare's text reflects his knowledge of Saxton, discuss how Saxton's maps signify that certain riparian and woodland landscapes are open to more intensive resource extraction, and consider several topical intertexts about artificial waterways which illuminate Shakespeare's unexpected presentation of the rebels' political divisions as an ecological debate about "turning" rivers and defending their autonomous rights to flow, meander, and flourish.

**Thomas J. Moretti (Iona University)**

### **“The Desert of Arden: Changing Nature in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*”**

This essay investigates the playful impact of human language on nature in *As You Like It*, a play noteworthy for its subtle transformations. Subsequently, I hope to consider the influence that poetic language has over our perception of and relationship with the natural world, for better and for worse. From the Forest of Arden to the human bodies performing on stage to the customs in which those bodies participate, Shakespeare celebrates the power of language to change what appears “natural” on stage—a term I use to refer to the generic quality of a scene as well as the customary appearances and inherent traits of characters and setting. I plan to scan over several otherwise disparate developments in the play: the inheritances in Orlando’s name; the Forest of Arden as both “desert” and Edenic; Jaques’ shifting moods in Arden; the poetic mutation of Orlando from brutish man to a motherly doe; and Rosalind’s subtle triumph in the final reunion scene. At each turn, I contend, Shakespeare showcases the power of dramatic, poetic language to adapt both the nature of the self and the self’s view of the other for the sake of social and ecological mutuality, both then and now. Jaques’ mournful tirade on behalf of a dead deer resounds with the same grief we might share today over a ship-struck right whale. And his later search for Duke Frederick, converted from the human world in “this wild wood” by “an old religious man” (5.1.164-66), might seem more akin today to the radical decision to live off the grid, or, perhaps more moderately, to escape the modern world for a moment to find the kind of peace that someone like Wendell Berry has poeticized as a uniquely natural quality.

**Shaun Nowicki (University of California, Santa Barbara)**

## **“Shakespeare’s Abject Nature: *King Lear*, Disability, and the Meaning of Mud”**

*King Lear* has long been a nexus for discussing Shakespeare’s divergent conceptions of nature. Ranging from the primordial goddess that spurs Edmund’s usurping to the cosmic indifference that Lear finds in the eye of the storm, these different visions of nature inflect our understanding of how the human fits into the larger world and frequently points us back to the human body as a normative index of that relation. In essence, how the human body fares when confronted with a particular conception of nature enacts a given philosophy of how nature works. This paper asks what we might glean from the interactions between disabled bodies and the natural world. Specifically, I examine how earthy matter (broadly construed as mud, earth, dirt) often appears in the play as a natural material that allows for an understanding of disabled bodies at their most abject. Lear’s descent into madness is understood as developing alongside the enormity of the storm, but it reaches its most dire condition upon his descent into the earthy hovel and during his wandering of the barren countryside. Similarly, Edgar’s feigned madness is encoded onto his body through the smearing of his limbs with dirt, and his performance of madness is predicated on this material coating acting as a sign. In this paper, I will also examine some of the religious and natural philosophical doctrines that form the basis of this interpretation. Several Renaissance theories of matter describe earth as nonliving matter, even as it exists and helps create the larger animation found in nature. While *King Lear* certainly engages these theories, implying that disabled bodies may be read as inanimate, the vexatious and contending readings of the natural, material world allows for an ecology of disabled bodies and the earth which invigorates both beyond sheer abjection.

**Holly C. Pickett (Washington and Lee University)**

## **“Shakespeare in the Cave”**

While Shakespeare’s forests have been well theorized, his caves (at least to my knowledge) have received less concerted attention. Caves in Shakespeare can be associated with everything from the treacherous plans of Tamora and Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* to the miraculous transformation of Jaques in *As You Like It*, from the bitter cynicism of *Timon of Athens* to the rugged pastoralism of the exiled Welsh brothers in *Cymbeline*. Stage directions of the period sometimes suggest that a cave is below the stage—“An Angel ascends from the cave, singing” or “Victoria rises out of the cave, white” (Martyred Soldier 241, 244)—while other stage directions are less forthcoming, using words like “out of” or “into” that don’t specify the staging conditions. The cave’s flexible staging possibilities echo its versatility as a symbolic setting. Proceeding in roughly chronological order through Shakespeare’s “cave plays” leads us from plays in which caves have clear thematic and even moral associations to *Cymbeline*, the play in which I will argue that Shakespeare combines parts of all of his caves’ previous associations to achieve his richest and most ambiguous representation of the geological formation as a place for character formation and gender transformation.

The multivalence of the cave as a setting in Shakespeare suggests its versatility as a vehicle for sparking philosophical reflections, a place of hibernation, deliberation, or transformation. The alternation between high and low imagery in the cave imagery in *Cymbeline*, which blends the rustic and hunting imagery of *Titus* with the spiritual connotations of *As You Like It*, suggests the

cave could benefit from a staging that plays with perspective by maximizing the height differences between high and low at various points in the play. This scenic geography helps reinforce Wales as a place for perspectival changes and transformation, as well as the subversion of gender norms, paving the way for Cymbeline's self-described adoption of the role of "mother" in Act 5 and Imogen's reunion with Posthumus, whose quest to find the "woman's part in him" led him through the gender-nonconforming caves of Wales and, finally, back to the British court. In this way, the cave then assumes the role it often had in ancient rites of passage, a place of rebirth.

**Mikhaila Redovian (University of California, Davis)**

**"Global Ocean Gyres and Mediterranean Setting; Exploring the possibility of return in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*"**

*Pericles, Prince of Tyre* has been referred to as a "mouldy tale," one that draws the audience into antiquity both by showcasing John Gower in the opening scenes, and through adaptation of the classical Apollonius tale. This meandering, sea-faring story is full of romance storytelling modes, chief among them the providential and enriched return. Pericles sees a suit of armor returned by fishermen; Thasia is both taken and returned because of the waves; and Marina is likewise returned to her status as a princess due to the contact enabled by sailing. However, I contend that this text is responding not only to romance narrative modes, but also directly to a growing awareness of ocean gyres as important drivers of exploratory and merchant voyages. Though this phenomenon was most revolutionary in a Pacific setting, I argue that the text is working through global oceanic anxieties by plying familiar waters in terms of setting (the Mediterranean) and genre (romance). As Pacific historian Andrés Resendez explains, harnessing the power of ocean gyres by European sailors opened new trade possibilities in Pacific and Atlantic contexts, routes predicated on "returns." As a result of gyres, traders could depart from the Americas, visit the Pacific, and then return to the Americas without having to complete a lengthy and dangerous full circumnavigation of the world. Blue Humanities scholars such as Dan Brayton and Steve Mentz have pointed to the agential ocean as an important influence in Shakespeare's plays, and I argue that commodities and the enrichment of return are highly topical to this play. Thus, drawing on both genre-history approaches as well as more recent Blue Humanities approaches, I contend that this play is chiefly interested in the idea of the "return," even as it complicates the possibility of any true return home.

**Kirsten Schuhmacher (University of California, Davis)**

**"'bourn to bourn, region to region': Coastal Imaginings in *Pericles*"**

Scholars—namely Steve Mentz, Lowell Duckert, and most recently, Todd Borlik—have remarked that *Pericles* is Shakespeare's most oceanic play. Indeed, most of the play's action takes place whilst its cast of characters float atop treacherous waves. The ocean facilitates so much of the play's action that, in recent years, it has joined *King Lear* to become a touchstone for ecocritical Shakespearean scholarship. However, the oceanic action of the play is almost entirely narrated by John Gower. As a narrator, Gower, as explained in Shannon Kelley's article on shell dwelling, "fill[s] in the 'stages of the story'" (171). It is through Gower's narration that

audiences imagine the play's oceanic action and larger plot. Yet, it is often not the oceanic moments that make meaning in the play—it is the coastal moments that offer characters and audiences space to consider not just the action inside of the play but also the visualizations of England's past and future that extend beyond the play's narrative boundaries. My paper argues that the ability for the play to reach outside of itself is not just exemplified by the coast but facilitated by it. As an ecotone, or a transitional space between two biomes, the coastline is always in flux, moving and shifting, melding space and temporalities. Because it exists in a state of what Tamsin Badocoe calls “constant inconstancy,” it allows for meaning and outside signifiers to be mapped onto its shores. My paper turns to *Pericles*'s coasts to consider how ecotonal spaces reach into the past and the future to make meaning and promote desire both on and off the stage.

**Susan C. Staub (Appalachian State University)**

### **“Vegetal Time in *The Winter's Tale*”**

In this essay I focus on how Shakespeare uses plants and plant time in *The Winter's Tale*, the play's very title suggesting an interest in the temporal rhythms of nature. By considering the play in relation to plant temporality, I argue, we can read it as participating in the discussions about control over plant time and growth taking place during the period as explorers were bringing various non-native and exotic plants into England and as gardeners sought to propagate them in an often inhospitable climate. While some garden writers questioned the ethics of such botanical manipulations, most revelled in circumventing seasons—in creating “a flourishing shew of sommer beauties in the midst of winters force, and a goodly spring of flowers, when abroad a leafe is not to be seene,” in herbalist John Gerard's phrasing. Looking forward to current methods of plant hybridization and various kinds of genetic engineering, philosopher Michael Marder offers a dark assessment of these activities, defining the compulsion to control the lifecycles of plants as “an allegory of violence,” explaining that “[m]astery over an entity's time” is “mastery over its being” (*Plant-Thinking*, 102). Such a focus, seeks to show how Shakespeare engages in the debates between dominating and tending the natural world that scholars argue developed along with science in the early modern period.

By looking at the botanical rhetoric, I show how the plot yokes together human and vegetal and posits an alternative way of interacting with the world, one that ultimately celebrates generation and life. Using early modern botanical writings along with theories of plant life derived from the writings of Michael Marder and other critical plant theorists, I hope to show how Shakespeare ultimately turns us from an anthropocentric view of the world to a phytocentric view, an awareness and respect for the vegetal. Such awareness, in turn, allows for a reevaluation of female power and authority as well as of humankind's relationship to the natural world.

**Barbara Taylor (Australian National University)**

### **“An Art Lawful as Eating?: (Un)natural Orders of Consumption”**

When Leontes sees Hermione's statue animate, and descend her pedestal, he asks that if “this be magic, let it be an art as lawful as eating”. This question draws strict lines between the

miraculous and the mundane, the supernatural and the natural, and it also draws attention to the presumed lawfulness of eating. However, consumption, in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, was not a purely secular activity, but one at the centre of religious and cultural identity, and spiritually significant acts of eating were in fact a topic of much contention. What happens, then, when drama inverts the process of eating, and audiences witness the supremely “unnatural” event of humans being eaten, specifically by non-human animals? *The Winter’s Tale* is bisected not only by a shift in time and genre, but by the carnivalesque consumption of Antigonus by the bear that pursues him off stage; *The Two Noble Kinsmen* begins with a description of three kings as their corpses are eaten by scavenging birds on the battlefield. This paper will read these moments of consumption, and the plays’ encounters between human and non-human animals, to consider how the human/animal divide is destabilised by animal-eating-human. More subtly unnatural than the spectacularly abhorrent cases of cannibalism, incest, fratricide, or other grave human sins portrayed on the early modern stage, “man-eating” animals present a dishonourable, yet uncontainable, affront to the established “natural” order. Unlike sins committed by other humans, these instances expose the fragility of human-made and human-centred moral, legal, and religious systems. This paper argues that, by inverting the hierarchy of consumed animal and consuming human, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* overturn perceived orders of consumption and domination, highlighting the ways in which nonhuman agents can “denature” the so-called natural order.