Seminar 36 Re-weirding and/as Re-wilding in Shakespeare Abstracts

Colonizing, gendering, and wasting the wilds in Shakespeare

Sophie Chiari

In Shakespeare's lifetime, people were keen to de-wild nature to make it productive. With this in mind, I will study how the playwright constructed, by contrast, a seemingly non-anthropized nature thanks to preter- and super-natural elements. Through a close reading of "wilderness plays" such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It*, *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline*, I first intend to foreground the colonization of nature by weird entities. I will then explore how Shakespeare genders the wilds and associates the supernatural with the feminine or the masculine, depending upon the historical background he chooses to emphasize. I finally aim to discuss wilderness as waste. I will notably wonder whether Shakespearean wastelands may contribute to "(re-)weirding" the plays' performances, and examine how these marginal territories question our contemporary relations to nature and waste. All in all, I will argue that the preternatural enabled Shakespeare to deconstruct the early modern idea of the wilderness as a useless territory and to propose a holistic approach to a nature then torn between a pragmatic dimension which emphasized economic imperatives, and an uncanny aspect which turned the green world into the seat of indomitable forces.

Strange Arcadia? Wild and Weird Pastoral

Douglas Clark

Weird beings possess a power to predict, foresee, or influence future events; that which is wild acts or lives without restraint, posing both a threat and counterpoint to civil life. The 'weird' and 'wild' thus help determine what 'facets of existence' lie 'beyond human control' by accentuating what is not human: weird occurrences disclose what is supernatural or *inhuman*, while wild beings reveal what is *inhumane*. Examining the correlation between the weird and the wild in early modern drama offers, then, a ripe opportunity to consider the place that ideas of the abnormal or the strange took in shaping intellectual and literary conventions of the era. My paper addresses this topic by considering how the notion of the strange functions in the English pastoral mode. I use Shakespeare's *As You Like it* and Samuel Daniel's *Queen's Arcadia* (1606) to query the extent to which the bucolic and pastoral habitats of Renaissance drama can be considered weird and wild. What should be viewed as 'strange' – to invoke Rosalind/Ganymede's claim that they 'can do strange things' (5.2.58) – in dramatic environments brimming with supernatural potential? How weird could the pasture or wood become?

Re-weirding and Rewilding Prospero's Ocean

Sarah Crover

The Tempest opens with the spectacle of a magic-induced storm at sea. Although the storm audiences are confronted with is explicitly fabricated, one of the storm's inspirations came from a real account of a disastrous hurricane English colonists encountered in the Bermudas.

Prospero’s magic, Caliban, and the army of spirits that people the isle remain obvious examples of the preternatural uncanny in modern eyes, but it is easy to forget that all that Prospero can do temporarily, the ocean always already does “naturally.” St. Elmo’s fire, hurricanes, rogue waves, etc. are natural, though deeply weird and alienly wild oceanic phenomena. Those caught up in the devastation of hurricane Helene might have belatedly realised, but everyone in early modern England knew the life-altering, wild ferocity of sea storms. After all, they would have been aware that the invading Armada was routed by a storm, supernatural or not. The phenomena Shakespeare describes emphasizes rather than elides the deeply uncanny reality of the open ocean. Following the lead of this panel’s call, this paper will seek to re-weird and re-wild *The Tempest’s* ocean. Ultimately, I argue, if we hope understand the place it held in the early modern consciousness, we need to look anew on the play’s marine elementality to avoid misrecognizing the ocean as merely a staged spectacle.

The fog and the blood: Shakespeare and *Arden of Feversham*

Nathan Dooner

In 1770, Edward Jacob produced an edition of the anonymous 1592 play, *Arden of Feversham,* in which Jacob argued that Shakespeare must be considered a viable candidate for the play’s authorship. Jacob justified his opinion by linking some of the play’s weird and gruesome scenes to passages from Shakespeare’s accepted writings (vi).Many later editors followed Jacob’s approach, such as Ronald Bayne’s 1897 edition, which suggested that the play reached the heights of “Shakespearean irony” during a scene where the characters lose themselves in wilderness and fog (ix-x).Owing to the rise of computational analyses, modern editors have increasingly supported the theory of Shakespeare’s hand in *Arden of Feversham*. Catherine Richardson’s 2022 *Arden Early Modern Drama* edition considered the digital tests, linking *Arden of Feversham* to Shakespeare, to be “so broad and the results they give so regular as to suggest that there cannot be this level of smoke without some kind of fire” (45). Through the lens of *Arden of Feversham*, this study examines what is at stake when editors make authorship claims for anonymous plays, and the role of thematic experts in weighing in on those judgements.

Hermione’s Better Grace: Weird Power

Gillian Murray Kendall

Leontes fears Hermione more than Prospero fears Sycorax, whose power, years after her death, he contests by releasing Ariel from the cloven pine. Being dead, Sycorax never has a chance to counter his power, and he never really has a chance to prove his superiority. His power is unchallenged. Who would challenge it? Caliban? In “Hermione’s ‘Better Grace’: Weird Power,” I want to look at a similar pattern of power balances in *The Winter’s Tale* between Leontes and Hermione. Leontes’ power is something we’re familiar with, albeit its sudden appearance. He throws a tyrant’s tantrum; he bends those around him to his will; he makes Polixenes look like an impotent king (his later appearance in the sheep-shearing is telling—we never see him at the center of a court). I don’t think we’ll ever know why Leontes’ anger and jealousy arises when it does, but when it does it is as if Leontes had looked upon Hermione and seen someone like Sycorax. In the course of my paper, I will

examine the untouchable power of Hermione's pregnancy (he can't execute her any more than the pregnant Sycorax can be executed) and Leontes' determination to remove all aids to her power (she is denied the child-birth privilege). But he can't get rid of her, at least not right away—not until, apparently, she dies of her own grief. We've seen this Lady Macbeth-ish kind of female power before of course, and much has been written about it. Less so about the sheer weirdness of the stature scene, which makes Leontes abdicate his power, offer up his sanity, be ready to lay down his life. But the very room where the statue is kept reverberates with power. It is in some sort of chapel hidden away, and the statue within is covered with a curtain. Power contained. When it is released is one of the weirdest and most dangerous moments in any of the plays. We have to be told the 'magic is lawful' because anything else would tear the fabric of the Sicilia-Bohemia myth of where power lies and who has it. And who doesn't. And the weirdness with which is must be contained. And the terrifying weirdness that sets it free.

Timon of Athens as Beast Fable

David McInnis

Timon self-consciously elects to become a kind of wild man in the second half of his play, positioning himself literally beyond the pale (outside the walls of Athens) and adopting a 'sour cold habit' (coarse clothing, as well as cynical attitude; 4.3.238). His melancholy is described by Apemantus as 'unmanly' (4.3.202), carrying the suggestion of being 'opposite to humanity' (as Apemantus himself was formerly accused of being, 1.1.280) as much as being a gendered rebuke. And yet, surprisingly, the adjectival uses of 'wild' in the play pertain primarily to Alcibiades: the Senator's fearful reference to Alcibiades' 'approaches wild' (5.2.49) and the reference to 'wild Alcibiades' wrath' in Timon's reply (5.2.88). The one time the Folio text does use 'wild' in conjunction with Timon (the third and final adjectival example in the whole play), editors since Hanmer have emended 'wild' to 'mild': 'It almost turns my dangerous nature *mild'* (4.3.487). But what if Timon *has* become wild, just at the moment that 'the commonwealth of Athens is become a forest of beasts' (4.3.346-47)? In this paper, I intend to explore the significance of Timon's 'aping' of wild-man status, and think about the play's possible thematic connections to Jonson's more traditional beast fable (also in the King's Men's repertory), *Volpone*.

The Weird Phenomenology of Soil Consumption: 'Geophagic Affect' in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*

Victoria Louise McMahon

The aim of this paper is to reconsider affect and its weirding process in relation to the 'new paradigm' of neurological studies, gut health, and its mind-body connection to the consumption of natural matter that is fundamental to this system – soil. The 'gut brain axis' controls everything from systemic health to dysbiotic conditions such as depression, interrupted sleep patterns, food intolerance and eating disorders, and hallucinatory psychosis. It's weird to carry a whole wilderness inside you, a living biome initially fed by the ingestion of soil. Traced back to its wild, material origins, Weirdness can thus be viewed as an organic process of complete psychosomatic transformation catalysed by the consumption of localized soil as weird matter. Collapsing distinction between psyche and soma, health and disease, the

wilderness and the civilizing process, Geophagia (soil eating) is an ontological nightmare, hence it harbours an affinity to the supernatural and the weird. According to Michael Cisco's definition of the Weird, the "supernatural" appears as affect, thus aligning its manifestation with certain neurobiological tendencies controlled by the brain-gut axis. It is within Cisco's "bizarre encounter," that the health of both Juliet's and Hamlet's microbiome can be assessed. Each supernatural encounter generates cognitive, emotional and physiological affect according to how successfully each character has integrated geophagic practice within their own bodies.

'Until great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come:' Trees and Political Reordering in Early Modern England"

Nikki Roulo

Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him.[1]

So the witches promise Macbeth in Act 4. Macbeth scoffs at the prophecy and misinterprets the witches' claim as good news, for as he–and we–might readily conclude: "Who can impress the forest, bid the tree/ Unfix his earthbound root?"[2] By all logic, trees do not rip their roots out. And while the witches add a supernatural element to the play, its narrative remains far from fantastical in the Tolkein sense. While Malcolm's army certainly does not compel the trees to accompany them, he orders his men to take a bough each with them. While strategic from a military perspective, this action also quite literally bids the forest to spread vis-a-vis helping the trees spread their seeds and rewild Dunsinane. This essay seeks to unpack this peculiar scene of rewilding within a play preoccupied with rebellions, usurpations, and control. By tracing this scene of rewilding in *Macbeth* alongside the "planting" of Ireland, the essay underscores Shakespeare's attention to the environment and colonial impacts. It argues that the performative spectacle of rewilding in *Macbeth* is a critique of an intertwined political and environmental reordering.

Wild Men and the Weird/Weird Men and the Wild

Kelly Stage

The meaning of "wild" is gloriously multiple, but in the early modern British drama, the "wild man" comes to look a bit typical at times. Adapted from romance, ludic plays, and celtic legends, the wild dweller of the forest is typically rustic, unkempt, violent, and potentially savage and uncivilized. While the tradition of such wild men goes back well into medieval England and Europe, the iteration of the wild man as a figure in Early Modern literature, and especially in drama, interests me for its reverberations with the forest and with political power and access. This paper will look at the wild man in plays like *Mucedorus* and *Orlando Furioso*, and in performances away from the public theater---like in Lord Mayor's Shows, royal entertainments, and masques. In exploring these wild examples of refashioned primitives, green men, and outcasts, I want to understand the political and environmental imaginings of the wild, the weird, and the human. What makes humans into wild creatures or weird ones, and must those categories overlap? What happens to the weird parts of wild men

in performance—their primitivism, connections to supernatural elements and animals, and transformative properties—when they are brought into the structures of Shakespeare's drama (*King Lear*, *Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* to name a few). In other words, does Shakespeare keep the weirdness of the wild man, or process the weird into an otherness somehow less weird, or re-weirded, to an ever-more attenuated idea of the wild man?

Shakespeare's "Strangest Tale": The Portents, Revenants and Dopplegangers of Shrewsbury

David Summers

Battlefields are intrinsically eerie places, but Shakespeare's battlefield are uncommonly haunted. Philippi and Bosworth have their ghosts, and Macbeth's opening carnage its witches, for example. This essay explores the variety of ways Shakespeare uses the eerie and the uncanny to infuse his representation of the battle at Shrewsbuty fought between Henry IV and the collective of rebels under Henry Percy. Percy—"Hotspur"—positioned himself early in the play as a skeptic of all things supernatural, and yet in his dying breath in on the verge of "prophecying" . . . what we will never know. Shakespeare's account of Shrewsbury is rife with portentous moments, dopplegangers and revenants all of which will in the late 18th century become features of the gothic, and in the 19th, the evolving genre of "weird fiction." Falstaff's infantry troop, look to Westmoreland as if they were taken from the gibbets of England, revenants marching from one death to another. Falstaff himself plays the part of a revenant, while the Douglas is so unsettled by the many royal dopplegangers that he feels he is dealing with the mythical hydra-heads rather than more mortal men. Like all of Shakespeare's battles, Shrewsbury is a site of violence and confusion, but he adds to that a further turn of the screw by making its combatants also experience the unsettling sense of the uncanny and the weird. Significantly, he accomplishes this without any use of actual supernatural narrative features.

Strange and Wild Howls: Shakespeare's Imaginary Re-Wilding

Barbara Taylor

By the turn of the seventeenth century, the forests of England had been almost entirely cleared of their native predators. As greenspace was variously cultivated for the use of farming, grazing, or hunting, encounters with "wild" animals became increasingly rare, limited to the realms of exotic imagination, or imitated in exploitative animal shows like bear baiting. Due to their scarcity, nonhuman predators therefore occupied a potent space in the English literary imaginary; a useful shorthand to sketch ancient, future, or distant other-worlds that remained "wild" and self-sustaining, but potentially hostile and inhospitable to human contact. As such, literary encounters or evocations of wild, nonhuman animals present a particular kind of imaginary re-wilding, in which humans are invited to wander far off the path in their own local, tamed surroundings and envision alternative inter-species meetings in weirder realms. In this paper, I will consider the imaginative "re-wilding" that takes place in a selection of Shakespeare's late romances, potentially the weirdest and most magical of his corpus. In plays like *The Winter's Tale* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, encounters with wild animals (whether real or imagined) serve to re-enchant contact between the human and nonhuman world. Simultaneously, these hallucinated, speculative, or staged moments work to estrange

characters from their human-world identities, forcing them to integrate into the wild. By pulling apart these fantasies of encountering- and becoming-animal, this paper will argue that the weird wilds in these plays present an imaginative alternative to dreams of the pastoral and nightmares of a lawless wilderness.

(Re)Locating Weird Fiction in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Anne-Maree Wicks

Contemporary interpretations of the term "weyward" offer a kaleidoscopic lens for authors to re-imagine the three "Weird Sisters" in *Macbeth* (TLN130). Ava Reid's *Lady Macbeth* (2024) offers such a re-imagining by inferring the wilderness of its women characters as uncontrollable and dangerous supernatural beings. By exaggerating women's wilderness through their possession of witchcraft, Reid's novel invites critics and readers to view Shakespeare's three Weird Sisters as the "unholiest of creatures" (42), locked and chained together in the watery cave beneath Macbeth's castle. Such an interpretation unlocks the potential for a re-Weirding in Shakespeare's works. Reid's kind of re-Weirding contributes to a Weird Fiction movement that disrupts instantiating phallocentric order to produce a New Weird. As a contemporary reorientation that departs from the Old Weird and its characteristics, the New generates concern for critical scholars who view it as a negative effect for Weird Fiction. My interest in this seminar is locating the Weird Sisters alongside Reid's *Lady Macbeth* as a chaotic disruption of traditional views that constitute "wayward" / "weyward" as a negative and uncontrollable wilderness.