

## **Theatrical and Environmental Encounters: Abstracts**

### **Katie Brokaw, 'In Fair Yosemite Where We Lay Our Scene: Environmental Justice, Solidarity, and Frogs in *Romeo and Juliet* in Yosemite'**

This essay is a case study of Shakespeare in Yosemite's April 2023 production, *Romeo and Juliet in Yosemite*, which I adapted, directed, and produced. While *Romeo and Juliet in Yosemite* retained Shakespeare's characters and many of his most famous scenes and lines, it was drastically altered to be set in Yosemite in 2023; the characters dealt with the ecological issues that are facing the park as well as much of the rest of California. It featured the death by drowning of Benvolio due to flooded rivers, an evacuation due to fast-moving wildfires, and the true story of how Yosemite scientists have reintroduced the indigenous red-legged frogs to the Sierra Nevada ecosystem after a long effort to eradicate the invasive bullfrogs that had crowded them out. The final scene, taking place a year after the play's false ending in which the fates of the lovers amidst the wildfire evacuation was unknown, brought the Capulets and Montagues together to release the frogs into the wilderness, joined by a very much alive Romeo and Juliet.

This essay's implicit argument is that deep adaptation is often necessary to create Shakespearean theatre that is truly ecological: rooted to the time and place of performance, containing salient messages about environmental issues, and leaving audiences and performers with feelings of hope or at least resolve rather than paralyzing despair.

### **Christina Cawdery, 'Nought so vile: Theatrical Intersections of Flora and Religion in *Romeo and Juliet*'**

When we meet the Friar in Act 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*, the audience does not see him contemplating the astronomical images often associated with the divine and referenced in the play. Instead, he is gathering plants at dawn, considering the nature of plants to hold both "medicine" and "poison." The Friar's garden thus becomes a theatrical space situated at the intersection of religion and nature, where earthly knowledge and spiritual counsel intertwine, and the power of terrestrial flora is considered alongside that of heavenly bodies. The Friar's opening soliloquy invites botanical imagery to consider a critical theme of the play: the ability to

help or harm is often dependent on how something— object or action— is applied.

The play further explores this duality in the Friar's own actions, as he uses flora to simulate death and enable resurrection. As the Friar employs earthly substances to enact divine intervention, he is situated as both doctor and priest: botanical knowledge is used in an attempt to mediate both bodies and souls. Shakespeare juxtaposes the Friar's holy intentions with the Apothecary's, whose use of the "natural" acts as a foil to the Friar's, and leads to mortality rather than revival. Flora becomes both sacrament and prop in both the performance of sacrifice and resurrection. Shakespeare ultimately braids together religion and ecology in theatrical spaces to explore how natural substances resonate, reflect, and react to the intersection of human agency and divine will.

### **Hillary Eklund, 'A Tale of Two Islands: Workshopping *The Sea Voyage*'**

In October 2025, my collaborator Debapriya Sarkar (UConn) and I partnered with Shakespeare scholar and theater maker Musa Gurnis (The Private Theatre) to organize a workshop using scenes from John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's 1623 tragicomedy *The Sea Voyage* to explore how performance-based research can enhance scholarly approaches to early modern plays. We were curious about what we could learn about the play's wet spaces—shores, lakes, rivers, and swamps—through performance. More specifically, we wondered how staging water might illuminate the play's meditations on different forms of mastery, on relations between humans and the more-than-human, and on water's role in mediating relations across genders, nationalities, and races. Over two days, professional directors guided actors in a free class where the play's demands for world-building and group dynamics, as well as the illusory yet insistent presence of water in the text, made claims on all of us. My contribution to the seminar "Theatrical and Environmental Encounters" discusses what and how we learned from the encounter between our ecocritical approaches to *The Sea Voyage* and the practice-based expertise of the directors and actors in the workshop. Beyond its role in disseminating ecological ideas through the staging of early modern plays, performance-based research can expand our scholarly habits of imagination, reconfigure the products of scholarship, and amplify its interpretive stakes.

## **Nathan Keckley, “Let me breathe awhile!”: Despair and Pollution in *Doctor Faustus***

This paper examines how Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* stages atmospheric pollution and its effects on London’s inhabitants. I argue that Faustus’s despair should be read not just as a spiritual matter, but as a respiratory crisis resulting in asphyxiation. The smoke produced by the play’s pyrotechnics would have generated an atmosphere that merged with, and reminded spectators of, their city’s polluted air, allowing audiences to appreciate *Doctor Faustus* as a play that staged problems of public health and the environment that they themselves experienced.

Because the early moderns interpreted despair through the lens of humoral theory, in which a surfeit of melancholy could drive one to despair, I argue that attention must be paid to the physiological elements of Faustus’s psychomachia. Furthermore, since bad air was seen as a cause of melancholy, and since that humor was supposed to cause respiratory ailments, a central object for such an inquiry should be the play’s atmosphere. I show that air and breath are indeed major concerns within the text. Faustus’s antepenultimate words before he is dragged down to hell, which form the title of this paper, epitomize his gasping state. Furthermore, I show that the abundance of sulfurous fireworks used in productions of *Doctor Faustus* would have signified not only hell (the place of fire and brimstone), but also London itself, which was burning increasing amounts of sulfurous sea coal. Olfactorily, medically, and culturally, playgoers would have recognized a connection between the diabolical fumes that harmed and doomed Faustus and the actual fumes of London that they knew harmed them. This connection would be visibly illustrated when the respective atmospheres merged into one another through the openings of London’s outdoor playhouses – a merging spectators would only have to look up to see.

## **Simon Smith, ‘*Twelfth Night* Outdoors’**

All the early documented performances of *Twelfth Night* all took place indoors (Middle Temple Hall, 1602; Court, 1618; Court, 1623). Yet for well over a century, much of the play’s modern performance history has been outdoors: from the Boston Lend-A-Hand Club (1908) to New York’s Shakespeare in the Park (2025); inaugurating open-air theatres in Regent’s Park, London and Ashland, Oregon in the 1930s; appearing regularly at the reconstructed Shakespeare’s

Globe Theatre (2002; 2003; 2012; 2017; 2021; 2023 ['For One Night Only'], 2025); providing staple fare for summer touring productions in UK stately homes and gardens (Duke's Theatre Company, 2023; Lord Chamberlain's Men, 2025). From the tip of Cornwall to the Utah Shakespeare Festival, an outdoor *Twelfth Night* is never far away.

Yet the play is not self-evidently an 'outdoor' piece in the way that forest-set comedies such as *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are; nor does it have the literal outdoor setting of *The Tempest* to explain its popularity. Whilst certain prominent sequences such as Malvolio's letter-reading before the box-tree (2.5) and Sir Andrew's duel with Cesario at the orchard-end (3.4) are set outdoors, much of the play's setting is either ambiguous or explicitly indoor. What, then, makes this such an appealing play for outdoor performance? Or, to put it the other way around, what can outdoor performance do for *Twelfth Night*? My paper will think through *Twelfth Night*'s 'outdoors-ness' as means of getting purchase on the play's prominent yet strangely elusive position amongst the core Shakespearean stage repertory of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **Jeff Theis, 'The Affordances of the "green plot:" Shakespeare Outdoors'**

What are some of the ways in which Shakespeare's texts take on additional meanings and implications when performed in outdoor environments? In terms of affordances, what does the natural environment, as opposed to constructed scenery and more conventional stages, afford Shakespeare's text, actors' bodily and vocal actions, etc.? My intent is to draw from professional performances with the hope to interview and engage actors from Actors' Shakespeare Project in Boston, MA. So, at this point, I do not necessarily know which play or plays I will focus on. Interpretive questions I will pursue may include the following: How do actors inhabit outdoor spaces. How do outdoor environments subvert or call into question characters' movement or vocalizations in the play? Do the locations develop or accentuate new ways of seeing Shakespeare's outdoor scenes (e.g., the garden in *Cymbeline*, the forests or wilds in *AYL*, *MND*, *Cym*, *Tempest*). How do indoor scenes play when performed out of doors? The direction or directions the paper takes, clearly, will depend on the evidence provided by the actors I interview.

## **William Floyd Wolfgang, “Thou Owest the Worm No Silk:” Practical Ecodramaturgy and Ecoscenography with the OrangeMite Shakespeare Company’**

In January 2026, the OrangeMite Shakespeare Company, based in York, Pennsylvania, produced the final play of its complete thirty-nine-play Shakespeare Canon with an eco-*King Lear*. In this essay, I situate this production within the practical difficulties of balancing ecodramaturgy and ecoscenography. Through an examination of past productions and the ecodramaturgy in *Lear*, I discuss the intended affective impact for audiences.

OrangeMite’s *Lear* centers around the silkworm. Despite being one of the most ubiquitous forms of animal life on the planet, with some estimates as high as approximately 80 percent of the world’s species of animal life, insects like the silkworm rarely take center stage in a Shakespeare production, ecological or otherwise. I sought to incorporate their life cycles, their uses to humans, and how they contribute to what Simon Estok’s concept of ecophobia, a fear and/or hatred of the natural world in this reimagining of *Lear*. Using this conceptual design, OrangeMite’s *Lear* also explores the bounds of bio and metallurgical extraction alike and how they seem to know no end in the first quarter of the 21st century. With little hope that that will change in the next quarter or beyond, I argue that we must look for other moments of ecocatharsis through direct engagement with a combination of ecodramaturgy and ecoscenography, in all theatrical and nontheatrical spaces alike. Eco-performance can explore new approaches to reckoning with these persistent and ongoing anxieties. By this purging of fear, guilt, and the ongoing anxiety over the climate crisis, we can find a path to purge destructive and pervasive ecophobia.