

Ecological Resilience SAA 2016—New Orleans

Seminar Co-Leaders: Keith Botelho (Kennesaw State University)
and Rebecca Laroche (University of Colorado, Colorado Springs)
Co-Respondents: Rebecca Bushnell (University of Pennsylvania)
and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (George Washington University)

Preservation and the Flood in Early Modern Devotional Literature

Tamsin Badcoe, University of Bristol

In *A Silver Watch-bell* (1605), Thomas Tymme offers a meditation on how to live a good life, using the metaphor of the watch-bell to figure the process of calling even the ‘most profane worldling, and carelesse liver’ to salvation and awakening ‘the most drowsie harted sinners’ to grace. In the work’s third chapter, which concerns ‘the general day of Doome’, he likens the cataclysmic events described in the Book of Revelation to a sea tempest, which can be contemplated as preparatory in kind, if not scale, and asks his readers to imagine the actions of a mariner in the midst of a hostile sea. As a microcosm of a world undone and made uninhabitable, the sea storm is offered as a preview of the elemental chaos of the apocalypse and the spiritual challenges this would pose. Fear of drowning acts as a prompt for the repentance of sin: a ‘thousand times happie and blessed’, he writes, will that man be ‘whose conscience in that time wil make them merry and glad’. By thinking about Tymme’s analogies alongside prayers written for mariners, such as those of Thomas Dekker, published as *Foure Birds of Noahs Arke* (1609), this paper will raise questions concerning ecological resilience when the *oikos* is at sea. The fragile man-made habitat of the mariner heightens awareness of temporality and contingent events and the ever-present proximity to water invites retellings of Noah’s flood; actions and their consequences are intensified in microcosm, prompting reflections on preservation, agency and ritual that have implications for past and current land-based practices.

War and Resilience: Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* and the Anglo-Spanish War

Ben Bertram, University of Southern Maine

Given the extreme spectacle of human on human violence in Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great*, it is easy to overlook the remarkable violence the plays’ soldiers inflict on non-humans, indeed on the planet itself. I will argue that *Tamburlaine*’s boasting that he can radically alter the ecology of the planet not only resonates with, but is also to some extent derived from, the English desire to shape the physical environment both abroad and at home as a result of the Anglo-Spanish War. Unlike France and the Low Countries, England did not have to rebound from military sieges on its own towns and cities. Nevertheless, the term “resilience” helps us better understand the way English anxieties over security and survival—the potential catastrophe of a Spanish invasion—pushed the nation to prepare for war through deforestation, ship building, iron mining, weapons manufacture, and the construction of fortresses, harbors, and dams. Recent critiques of the concept of resilience by Brad Evans, Julian Reid and others, I further argue, can help us understand the way “perpetual war” dictated what resilience meant in the sixteenth century and the way it continues—*mutatis mutandis*—to do so in the twenty-first. The war with Spain, like the most recent “war against terror,” led to a push for new technologies that would alter the physical environment, strengthen defenses, and expand economic and military power. As part of an assemblage of war that led to significant

changes in the ecology of early modern England, Marlowe's plays speak to our own historical moment in which human on human violence and violence against the planet are inextricably linked.

***The Tempest* and Scholarly Resilience of Prospero**

Rinku Chatterjee

In *The Tempest* nothing is ever lost to the sea. The separations and grief caused by the ocean are temporary, and the play ends with restorations and reconciliations. The ocean does not claim for itself, but returns all, replicating the cycle of ecological erosion and renewal. However, a key moment in the denouement is when Prospero promises to relinquish his magical knowledge by breaking his staff and drowning his book (possibly a grimoire). Since his obsession with books and knowledge is the central motif of the play—a knowledge that helps him regain his political power, a promise to renounce though seemingly counter-intuitive, is only symbolic. More importantly, the accepted method of destroying grimoires, and the perceived evil they contained was by burning them. Prospero, then, expects his knowledge to be restored to him. His desire to magically control nature, I argue, reflects the early modern urge to control, classify, and command nature, in notable contrast to Caliban's romantic appreciation of the island. Prospero's knowledge of the island and his control of it makes him resilient against adverse circumstances. This paper explores the early modern understanding of the relationship of human beings to nature, especially given the prevalence of shipwrecks and storms, of cholera and plague epidemics on the one hand, and of Neo Platonic insistence of human superiority on the other.

“No drowning mark”: Genre in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Popular Rhetoric about New Orleans' Recovery at the Ten-Year Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

Claire Dawkins, Stanford University

If Shakespeare's *The Tempest* can be put into dialogue with both scholarship and rhetoric about the destruction of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, then how does the discussion change when we add the concept of “resilience” to our critical lexicon? Both literary discourse about Shakespeare's play and journalistic coverage of the recent ten-year anniversary of the storm filter understandings about the interactions between man and nature through the lenses of literary genres. Where would “ecological resilience” fit into a discussion of genre, and how might the critical history of *The Tempest* help us to make sense of the overlapping and conflicting ways that New Orleans' recovery has been understood? This paper argues for a consideration of how “ecological resilience” and the literary genre of romance might work together; moreover, it argues that the resilience that romance offers can clarify and reconcile some of the conflicting textual representations of New Orleans and the island of *The Tempest*, both locations that have been battered by a potent combination of natural and man-made disasters.

Winter

Lowell Duckert, West Virginia University

“Thus we seemed to lie in a heape and wilderness of Snow.”

If winter is a time for tales – as multiple seventeenth-century book titles attest – then *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Captain Thomas James* (1633) is the period’s epitomic story of ecological resilience. James, searching for the fabled Northwest Passage in southeastern Hudson Bay, was forced to overwinter on Charlton Island from 1631-2; incredibly, he and most of his crew survived, finally sailing home the following summer. James’s vivid descriptions of dearth and death, summed up in his narrative of “The Wintering,” captures what “wintering” meant to many of England’s citizens and explorers who endured the climatic cold streak known as The Little Ice Age (ca. 1300-1850): *dangers* in “heape[s],” seemingly endless “wilderness[es] of Snow.” Reading early modern weather and words as inextricable phenomena, however, this essay will offer additional capacities of “winter” beyond its typical connotations “to provide shelter” (or to protect from, and sustain oneself through, the specific season of winter). I will argue that James’s *Voyage* reconceives winter as a frenetic (never frozen) mode of dwelling: it meditates, that is, on how things engage in transformative, open-ended processes of cryo-corporeal becoming, constituting a *strange* season of warm- and cold-bodied interpenetration that challenges temporal compartmentalization (into four chronological parts), ontological definition (the “human” who inhabits them), and allegorical appropriation (that same human’s “age”). In doing so, I will suggest that James’s account allows us to rethink wintering in our own warming world as well, one that threatens winter’s very disappearance and yet, at the same time, points to its ever-present, and sometimes-widening, polar vortices. I will wonder whether winter can truly afford a time of cohabitation – humans and nonhumans in rimy resilience – rather than a test of the former’s fortitude against the latter in increasingly pol/e/itical arenas. I will investigate, in short, a paradox that the early modern Arctic imagination usefully expresses: a wish for stability, but also for change, amongst unseasonable fluctuations – a form of resilience best conveyed through that most impermanent, and imperishable, substance of cold.

Flooded Thoughts: Coastal Climate and Sexuality in John Lyly’s *Gallathea*

Perry Guevara, Emory University

*“I feel my very brains moralized, and, as it were
a certain contempt of earthly actions is crept into my mind,
by an ethereal contemplation.” – Rafe (3.3.81-83)*

This essay argues that climate shapes cognition in John Lyly’s *Gallathea*. “Strange contraries” of mind and “thoughts unknit” under the threat of aqueous apocalypse (3.1.1, 50). Lyly sets the play in Lincolnshire on England’s eastern coast. The land meets the sea on the banks of the Humber, a large tidal estuary at the confluence of the Ouse and Trent Rivers, where, during Lyly’s day, the erosion of coastal dunes and salt marshes engendered the prime conditions for flooding. Even Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles* documents a particularly destructive Lincolnshire flood predating *Gallathea* by only a few years. Lyly rewrites the risk of flood as divinely issued; every five years the villagers of Lincolnshire must sacrifice their most beautiful virgin to Neptune, who will drown them

in a flood if they fail to comply. The sacrificial virgin is bound to a “fatal tree,” where the monster Agar (obsolete for “eagre” or “tidal bore”) gathers her on Neptune’s behalf. Her fate, according to Tityrus, “is not permitted to know and incurreth danger to conjecture” (1.1.55-56). Lyly further thematizes forbidden knowledge through Rafe, Robin, and Dick’s encounters with the mariner, who claims he can “shift the moon and sun” (1.4.30-31); the alchemist, who has mastered the mineral secrets of “such a beggarly science,” (2.3.27) and the astronomer, who “measure[s] how many yards of clouds are beneath the sky” (3.3.43). Their desire to know the earth through science is confounded by epistemological uncertainty and an inability to “learn this language” (1.4.65). Science’s equivocation is further confounded by the indiscernability of sex in Gallathea and Phyllida’s amorous encounter in the forest. The cross-dressed virgins seduce one another with botanical metaphors—“There is a tree in Tylos whose nuts have shells like fire, and, being cracked, the kernel is but water” (3.1.3-4)—as their sylvan courtship takes on the appearance of male-on-male romance. When the disguises come off at the play’s end, the girls balk at the impossibility of lesbian marriage and subsequently persuade Venus to transform one of them into a man. Queer critique meets cognitive ecology in my attempt to account for the “strange contraries” of surviving ecological disaster in Lyly’s local rewriting of Ovid’s story of Iphis and Ianthe.

The resilient fly

Shannon Kelley, Fairfield University

Nothing could be smaller or of less consequence for most of us than insects, yet on rare occasions they defeat human pride by surviving intact for millions years in Baltic amber, or fossilized tree resin. Amber insect inclusions inspired wit, scientific investigation, and moral handwringing, yet for poets these prehistoric stone assemblages belong to a narrative of the after. Martial was familiar with the belief that amber derived from Phaethon’s cataclysmic chariot ride and the tears of the Heliades, his sisters who turn into poplar trees. As an unintended consequence of these events, the insect trapped in tree resin presented early moderns with an ideally preserved specimen, undeserving of its fate in multiple ways but clearly linked to destruction’s wake. In Ovid’s version of Phaethon’s story, the earth eventually prospers and regains its strength. However, pain and history trap these particular animals, as they do the weeping trees. Martial’s three epigrams specifically draw our attention to the sisters who cannot walk away from epic disaster and the strange, indestructible legacy they give to (necessarily) small creatures. By doing so, Martial introduces the concept of secondary witnesses, the next generation marked by the trauma of ecological calamity.

When Thomas May (1594-1650) “Englished” all three of Martial’s amber inclusion epigrams in 1629, we see increased occurrences of the trope among poets, including Robert Herrick, whose interest in the preservative value of tree balm of all kinds (balsam, myrrh, frankincense, ambrosia, nectar, amber, and gum) is evident in the *Hesperides* (1648), a text written in the middle of the civil war. Yet the amber insect remains an equivocal survivor for Herrick: does the specimen live, or has it become an object? If the bee, ant, or viper escapes mortality, should we admire or fear its fate? Through a close reading of Herrick’s translation of Martial’s Cleopatra epigram (4.59) – “The Amber Bead” – and “*His embalming to Julia*,” I trace how Herrick praises the paleobotany of amber, and even wishes to become an insect, small enough to survive in aromatic tree balm. His strategic hive of short, concise poems present a type of immortality that, he hopes, will surpass Cleopatra’s “royal

sepulchre.” King Charles I, the forest, and the great oak “(the Sovereign of all Plants)” would see the “down-fall of her aged trees,” but for Herrick small things sustain themselves.

Personal and Ecological Resilience in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Erin K. Kelly, California State University, Chico

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, characters flee to the forest from the court in order to escape danger and oppression, and the forest provides a physical and psychic space in which to create new identities and social orders. Many critics have written about the rhetorical and political utility of Shakespeare's green world. The forest around Athens is not consistently a real place in the play; the forest is different to different characters at different times. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ecological calamity is used as a figure for personal calamity. While the forest may provide a productive space for change, initially it is often a harsh and dangerous space that mirrors the state of a particular character(s). The connection between the forest and characters' condition suggests that emotional health and stability are closely tied to environmental conditions. Ecological resilience in the face of catastrophe or difficulty informs the potential for mental resilience and vice versa. The reunion of the characters and the return to Athens is made possible because of Theseus' choice to go hunting. The hunt, as described in the play, offers characters and readers a model for harmonious living with nature that avoids both personal and ecological catastrophe.

“Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none”: 1610 as the Instantiation of the Anthropocene Epoch as a Result of Old and New World Lifeways in Collision

John Mitchell, Oakland Community College

My paper originates from an article in *Nature*, by Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, entitled “Defining the Anthropocene.” The authors argue for AD 1610 as the inaugural year for the Anthropocene, which is notably different than the usually proposed early dates (coeval with the Holocene ~11,700 years ago) or late ones (post World War II in the so-called “Great Acceleration”). I am interested in a synthesis of the early and the early modern dates because it is the very clash of the Old world with the New that provides the 1610 evidence. New world peoples had been pursuing, since their late Pleistocene arrival there, one particular form of Anthropoc intervention with the biosphere, which Charles Mann calls a form of “permaculture” – at particular odds with the massively invasive forms of resource exploitation and ecosystem alteration developed in the Old World. Thus, when Montaigne (in “Of Cannibals”) and other humanists wrote about the reports of early European explorers, they failed to recognize—both because New World food production was so different from Old World methods and decades of Native American population die-backs had resulted in the collapse of those methods—the extent to which New World peoples had themselves developed manipulations of the environment and instead reductively saw them as “noble savages” embedded in the wild environment and therefore ripe for exploitation like all other natural resources.

Earthquake, Being-quake: The Resilience of Forgetting

Karen Raber, University of Mississippi

In 1580, England experienced one of the worst of many earthquakes that pepper its history. This one was centered off the coast of Dover; it destroyed churches and homes, and was reputed to have rung bells as far away as France. Accounts that followed the event unsurprisingly emphasized the extensive damage to buildings, and the disorienting experience of human beings shaken awake, toppled from chairs, and otherwise tossed around by the earth's explosive adjustment. Yet the earthquake would also have affected animals, plants and the topography and composition of the earth itself, even if few reports mentioned such environmental disruption. Animal sensitivity to earthquakes was—and is—a well-known phenomenon; Diodorus Siculus wrote in 373 about the behavior of domestic and wild species that predicted a major quake in Helice, while in the 1970s, the Chinese took notice of the odd behavior of local cats and dogs in Haicheng and evacuated the city days before a massive quake, and in 1989 a scientist predicted the Loma Prieta quake by counting the notices for lost cats in the area's newspapers. Following some earthquakes, soil composition is drastically changed: liquefaction might endanger structures, but it also changes the very nature of soil, while rivers and lakes can dry up or be rerouted by heaving. This can leave cultivated crops and indigenous wild plant life without the customary elements they need to thrive. Prey animals may move *en masse* from their usual haunts, leading to changes in predatory animal behavior; migratory patterns might be disrupted for fish or birds. In short, the world is changed for more than just its human inhabitants.

Earthquakes were widely believed by early moderns to derive from the motion of winds and water. I bring together this fact, with those I touch on above, to discuss Lear's experience on the heath and Gloucester's blind journey to Dover in *King Lear*. I argue that both characters undergo a "being-quake," the term Timothy Morton uses to describe the result of encounters with hyperobjects that surpass human cognitive capacities. Why, after all, does Dover show up at all, when the play is otherwise geographically indeterminate? Critics from A.C. Bradley to Henry Turner have considered whether the play's geography represents a "real" England or not; they tend to agree that it remains undecidable or alien, rather than recognizably local—yet the play does insist on "Dover" as Gloucester's destination. That in turn suggests that Lear rages against the storm (which offers a variation on the earthquake for its powerful soul-shaking effect) in a nearby part of the countryside, making momentarily local and concrete what is otherwise abstract and unfixed. I argue that Dover's history as the site of the 1580 quake, although already faded in memory, remains an important context for the play's treatment of Lear's and Gloucester's new adaptability in the face of system shock. I further link Edward's and Kent's roles as memorializers of the two aged characters to the problem of necessary "therapeutic forgetting" and erasure that mark human and natural resilience in the aftermath of catastrophe. It is via these acts of un-knowing—that is, through an inversion of the usual humanist project rather than through something like "self-knowledge"—that the play achieves insights into human and non-human persistence in the face of ecological trauma.

Timon's Curse: Misanthropy in Catastrophic Times

Mary Steible, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

Today, Earth faces catastrophic geophysical changes, thanks largely to anthropomorphic combustion of fossil fuels, yet for decades the U.S. government and Americans in general have shown indifference. Global warming, climate change, ecological resistance—no matter the moniker applied to name the phenomenon—humans, especially Americans, have simply not acted. Why? Ignorance. Selfishness. Consumerism. Irresponsibility. In a number of ways, Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* presents a fitting parable for the contemporary Western mindset toward the Earth and its natural boundaries, not to mention humans' diminishing capacity for altruism, the one human trait that allowed *homo sapiens sapiens* to evolve over eons.

Some have called Timon altruistic because of his seeming generosity early in the play. However, the tragedy of Timon is that he lacks altruism and thus, from the play's start shows his misanthropic tendencies. He can give to friends when his wealth is intact, but he expects return on his investment (1.2.88-95), to echo the mercantile language of the play. Angered when others fail to reciprocate his "friendship terms," (loans) Timon walks away from servants, creditors, friends, and Athens. He purposely excludes himself from human presence, rather than showing real altruism, i. e. taking responsibility for his immaturity and consumerist lifestyle. He curses Athenians with plagues, encourages Alcibiades to war against Athens, and mocks all humans who pass by his woodsy dwelling. Worst of all, Timon does not turn to nature to meditate on his humanity or reflect on the purpose of life. He seeks no symbiotic relationship with the Earth. The Earth pays him back. Digging for roots, Timon finds gold, the ore that he blames for his misanthropy (4.3.381-92). The natural world does not need gold and it does not need humans. Long after we extinguish ourselves, the Earth will recover.

The Comforts of Apocalypse in Lucy Hutchinson's *Order and Disorder*

Mary Trull, St. Olaf College

Lucy Hutchinson's epic poem on Genesis, *Order and Disorder, or, The World Made and Undone*, published in part in 1679, reads the Biblical origins of the world as a precursor to its imminent destruction in her own time. As the wife of regicide John Hutchinson, Hutchinson perceives her own historical moment as a flagrant reversal of justice that can only lead quickly to an Apocalypse in which the godly folk oppressed by the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy will in turn be restored by God's hand. She frequently depicts the Apocalypse as an ecological catastrophe that, though in some sense unimaginable, also finds an analogy in contemporary catastrophes: floods, fires, earthquakes, etc. This essay considers Hutchinson's satisfaction in the upcoming Apocalypse that she hails triumphantly. The luxurious thrill with which Hutchinson depicts mountains crashing to earth and heavenly fire consuming all that humans have built is entirely in accord with the spectacular delights of Hollywood disaster films today. Imagining an ultimate, world-ending disaster, the threshold of the "posthuman," after which our species may no longer survive in a state we would recognize, involves a rending of time-consciousness that Srinivas Aravamudan has called "catachronism." As he writes, "Catastrophe is oddly comforting ... The sped-up time of lurching toward a cataclysmic event allows for many grand clichés around life and death and the intoxicating spectatorial sense produced by an aesthetic return to the grand canvas of epic." This essay will consider how Apocalyptic ecological crisis offers aesthetic and psychological satisfactions in Lucy Hutchinson's epic poem.