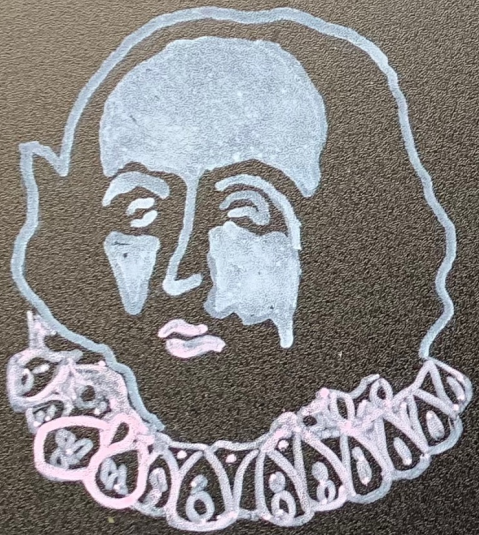
The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The overall composition is clean and modern, with the text centered in the white space.

“This World Uncertain Is”: The Environmental Humanities from an Early Modern Ecological Perspective

Lowell Duckert

University of Delaware

23/1/24



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© Lowell Duckert

What are the environmental humanities?

- ▶ Enmesh: refuse divides between human and nonhuman, nature and culture
- ▶ Decenter: challenge assumptions that humans and their perspectives are superior
- ▶ Encourage: build coalitions across disciplines that tackle real-world issues



What are the environmental humanities?

- ▶ “Environmental humanists share neither a single method nor a determinative object of analysis . . . More than anything, what unites the environmental humanities is a sense of shared and open endeavor addressed toward the remediation of environmental harm, and a powerful conviction that scholarship in the field must revisit its foundational assumptions and engage with a broad constituency.”

Stephanie Foote and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, eds.,
introduction to *The Cambridge Companion
to Environmental Humanities* (2021)



What are the environmental humanities?

- ▶ “A commitment to the world-making power of narrative, and especially [a] commitment to how stories mediate different registers of power and how narratives have historically managed the manifold vitality of the cultures, bodies, and objects that shape and are shaped by them.”

Stephanie Foote and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, eds.,
introduction to *The Cambridge Companion
to Environmental Humanities* (2021)



What are the environmental humanities?

- ▶ “Perhaps . . . what really defines the loose, still-evolving EH community of scholars is not [their] methods, nor [their] analytic focus, but [their] gregariousness, [their] insistence that the practices of making and communicating ecological knowledge should be collective, should proceed in conversation with and across other disciplines, and should test the limits of disciplinary methods. The environmental humanities cannot be a solitary practice.”

Stephanie Foote and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, eds.,
introduction to *The Cambridge Companion
to Environmental Humanities* (2021)



← Cours →



Animal Studies
questions “human” and “animal” distinctions
favors “multi-species” over speciesism
abuse, domestication, biodiversity
companionship

Environmental Justice
asks how to define, protect, and expand “rights”
intersects with Indigenous, urban, and Black ecologies
health, law, equity
repair

Ecofeminism
explores relationships between women and the environment
charts gendered spaces and roles
misogyny, patriarchy, reproductive rights
embodiment

← Cours →



Material Ecocriticism

traces the activity of physical matter
sees humans and nonhumans as storytellers
assemblages, networks, the “more-than-human”
agency

Queer and Transecology

disputes “natural” sexuality and gender as hetero-, cis-
embraces non-normative affiliations and kinships
affect, fluidity, orientation
desire

Postcolonial and Political Ecology

focuses on encounters: hierarchies, borders, violence, and exchange
interrogates policies of in- and exclusion, em- and displacement
resourcism, extractivism, imperialism, sovereignty
power

← Cours →



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et Plus!

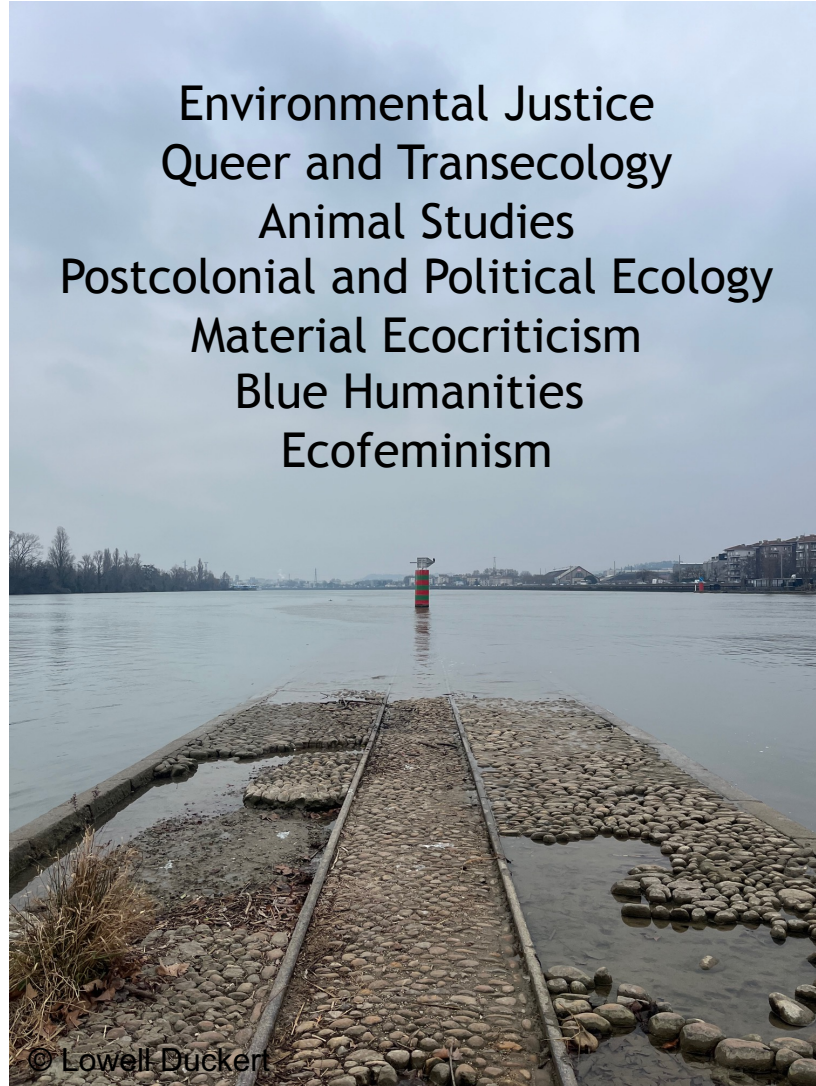
The Blue Humanities

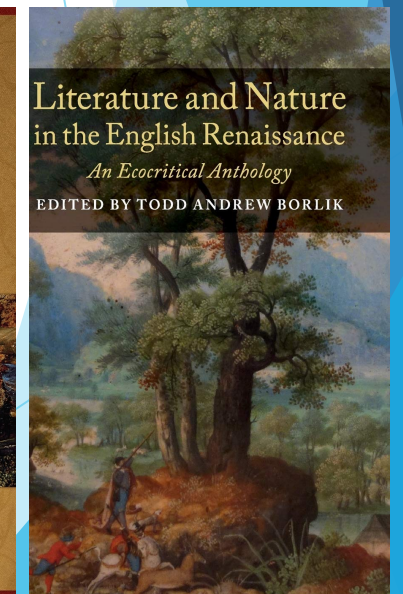
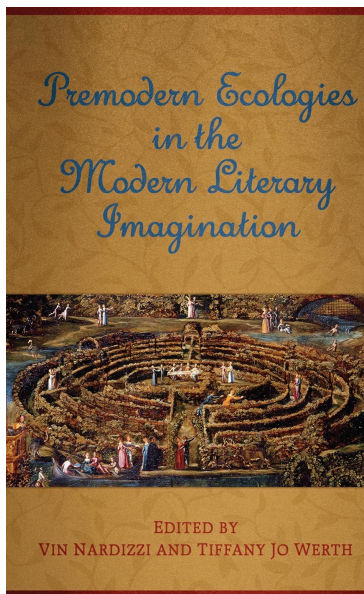
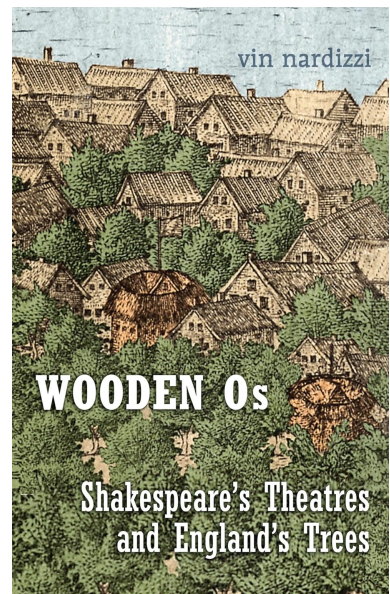
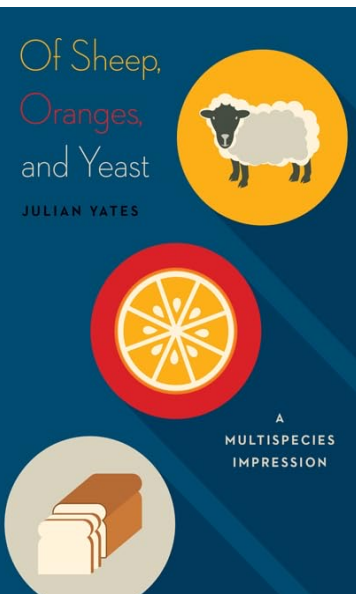
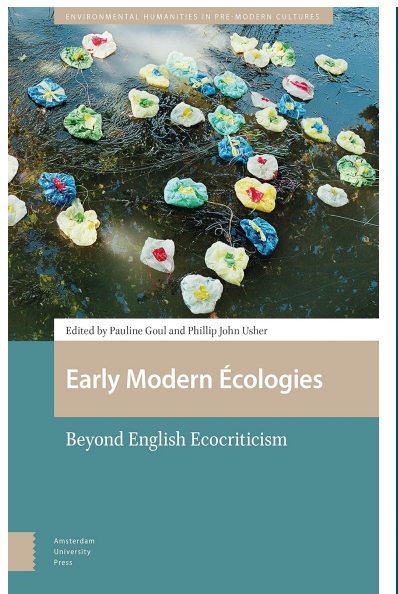
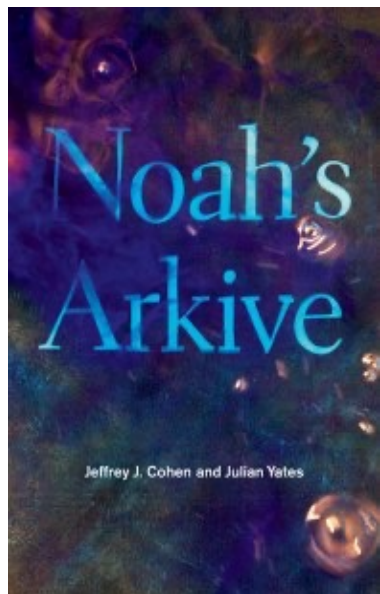
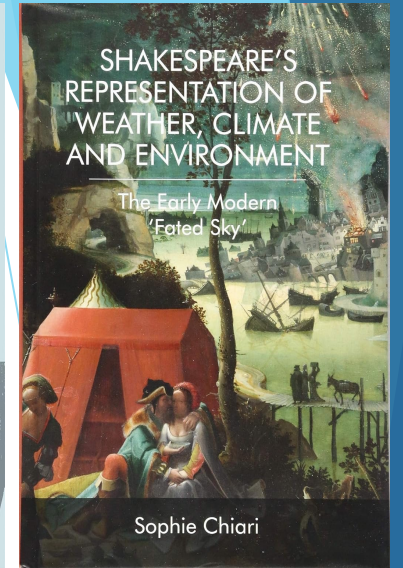
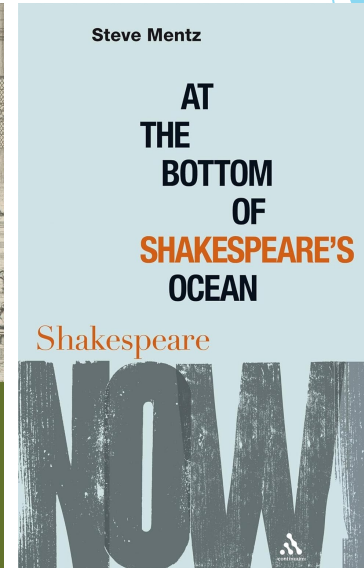
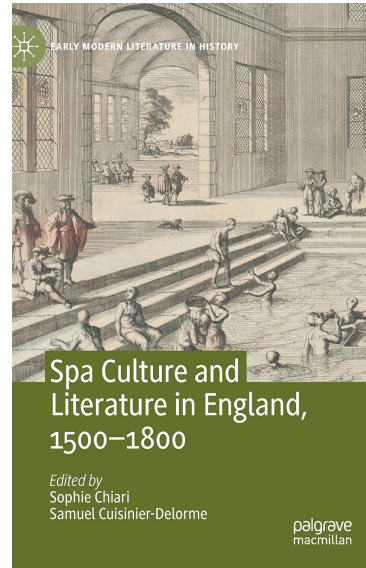
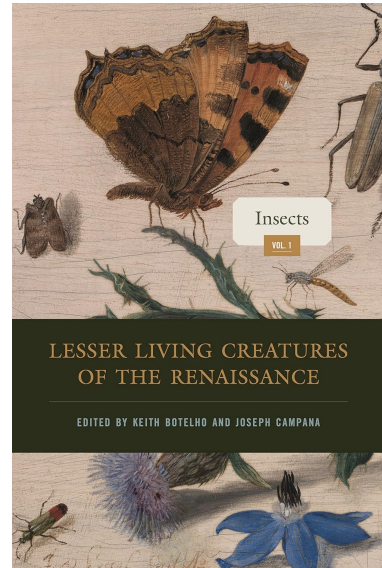
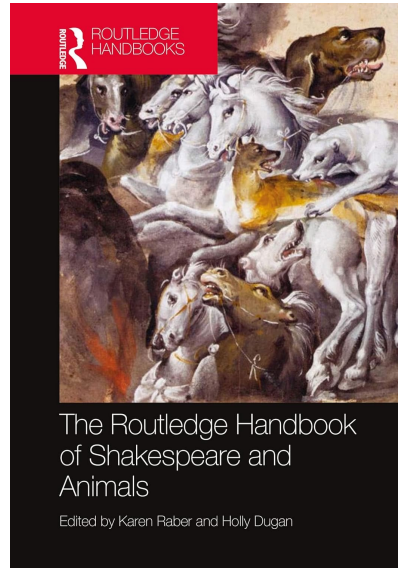
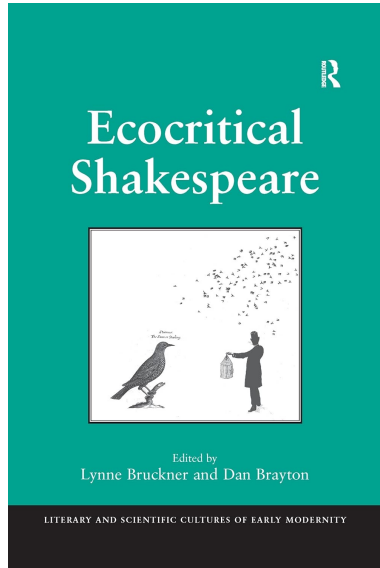
- “Combine water with human ideas . . .
- Combine literary, historical, and critical modes . . .
 - Craft critical languages that respond to strife while also seeking justice for humans and nonhumans alike.”

Steve Mentz,
An Introduction (2023)

~ Confluence ~

Environmental Justice
Queer and Transecology
Animal Studies
Postcolonial and Political Ecology
Material Ecocriticism
Blue Humanities
Ecofeminism





The Little Ice Age

[The Song:]

“Adieu, farewell earth’s bliss,
This world uncertain is.”

Thomas Nashe,
“Backwinter” (1592-1600)



The Bristol Channel Flood

“Mortals pointlessly strive to restrict the outlaw waters with laws (which are not bound by law) . . . No fixed rule applies in fluid matters, And quickly the driven wave swelled by with swollen blasts of wind . . . Neptune, there is no faith in your government. Boldly you protect the things that are yours, And by force you snatch those that belong to others.”

John Stradley,

“ . . . about the Incredible Flooding of the Severn . . . in Which That Seawall Recently Built at Aberthaw Was Overcome and Wholly Torn Apart” (1607)

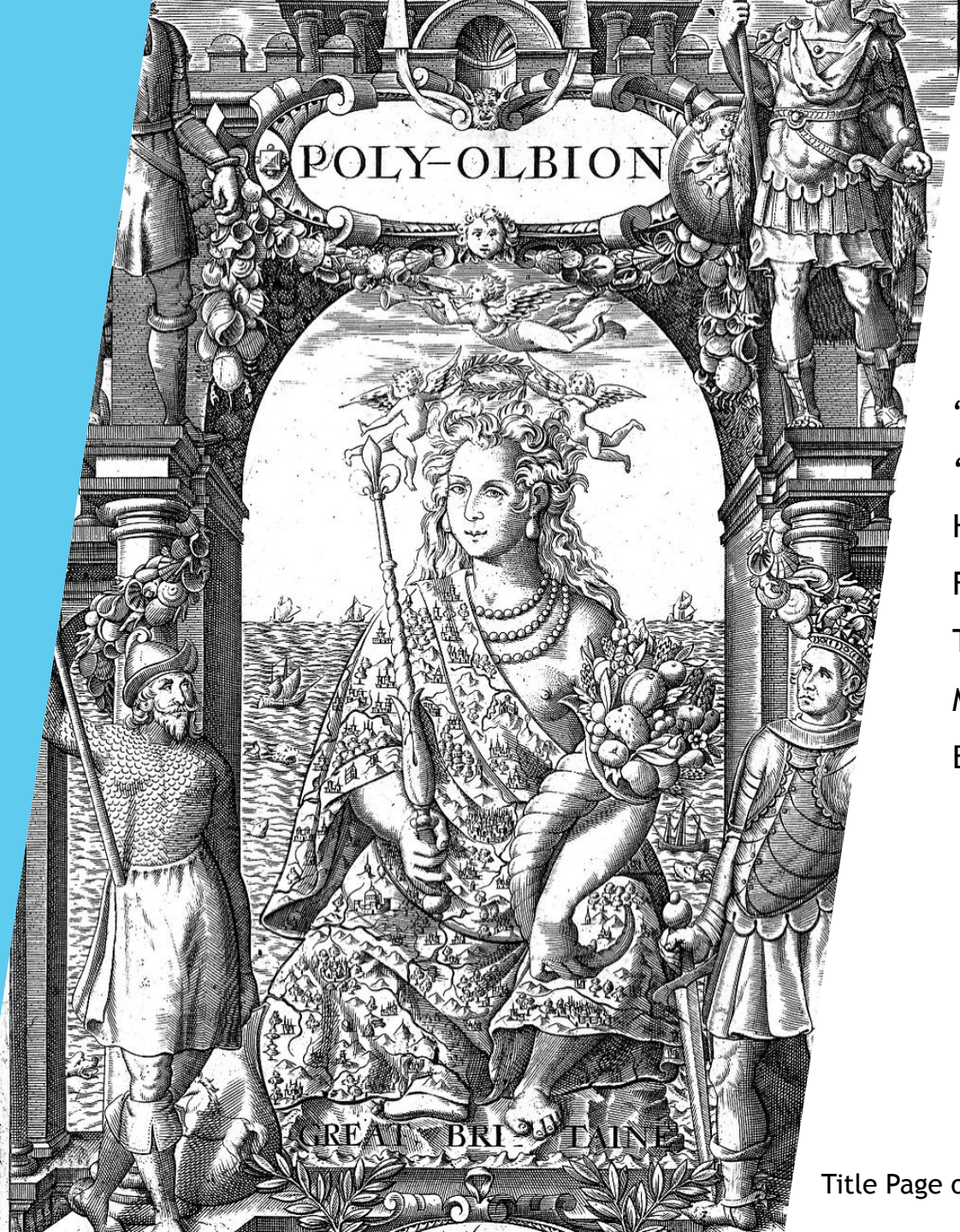
1607.

A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflowings of Waters, now lately in Summerset-shire, Norfolke and other places of England: destroying many thousands of men, women, and children, overthrowing and bearing downe whole townes and villages, and drowning infinite numbers of sheepe and other Cattle



Printed at London by W.I. for Edward White and are to be solde at the signe of the Gunne at the North doore of Paules.

Frontispiece, 1607. Source: [Wikipedia](#), [Creative Commons](#).



Deforestation

“Thus of her own self the ancient Forest [Arden] spake:
‘My many goodly sites, when I first came to show,
Here opened I the way to mine own overthrow.
For when the world found out the fitness of my soil,
The gripple wretch began immediately to spoil
My tall and goodly woods, and did my grounds enclose:
By which in little time my bounds I came to lose.’”

Michael Drayton,
Poly-Olbion (1612)

Air Pollution

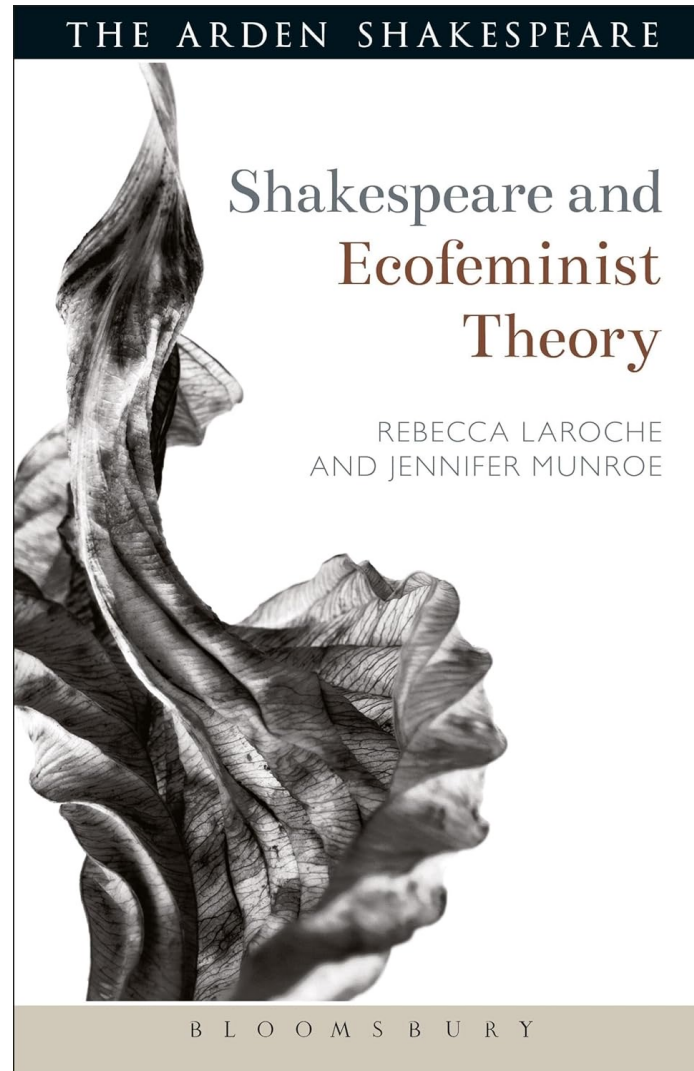
“Let it be considered what a Fuliginous crust is yearly contracted, and adheres to the Sides of our ordinary Chymnies where this grosse Fuell is used; and then imagine, if there were a solid...Canopy over *London*, what a masse of *Soot*e would then stick to it, which now (as was said) comes down every Night in the *Streets*, on our *Houses*, the *Waters*, and is taken into our *Bodies*.”

John Evelyn,
Fumifugium (1661)

Le Temps

“... does not idealize the language of the past, but rather sees in the past a destabilizing potential in this unthinking world.”

Rebecca Laroche and
Jennifer Munroe (2017)



Eco-Shakespeare Now!

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” is one of William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) most quoted lines. Lesser known, perhaps, is that he composed Sonnet 18 during a period of unseasonable cooling in England known as the Little Ice Age. This course examines the ways Shakespeare’s poems and plays responded to his dynamic, unsteady world. From animals, weather, and disease – and across forests, cities, and oceans – we will learn how his works reveal the complex relationships between humans and nonhumans; demonstrate the entwinement of place and imagination; manage visions of crisis/catastrophe; and redefine the meanings of “nature”/the “natural.” But we will also ask difficult questions inspired by our current ecological moment: how might turning to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts and performances provide us with methods for thinking about crises happening right *now* in the twenty-first? How can we better understand ecosystems and their enmeshed communities through Shakespeare’s works? What/who is excluded from ecologies? Why? How does Shakespeare construct, negotiate, and challenge modes of inhabiting the globe’s most fragile places? How can early modern art not only speak to the present but also help imagine, and usher in, more flourishing futures?

Speaking as the North

Image by [Наталья Коллегова](#), [Pixabay](#).

Othello (1601-3)

5.2

EMILIA 'Twill out, 'twill out. I, peace?

No, I will speak as liberal as the north.

215 Let heaven, and men, and devils, let them all,
All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.

IAGO Be wise, and get you home.

[He draws.]

EMILIA I will not.

“Though the Cousin german
of Death [winter] had so
strongly seiz’d thus upon the
exterior parts of this poore
Tabernacle of flesh, my
inward were never more
actif, and fuller of
employments then they
were that night . . .

Out of the North
All ill comes forth.”

James Howell,
A Winter Dreame (1649)

“This blacknesse proceedeth
of some naturall infection of
the first inhabitants of that
countrey, and so all the
whole progenie of them
descended are still poluted
with the same blot of
infection.”

George Best,
A True Discourse (1578)



Broadsheet depicting unknown Inuit woman and child, 1567. Source: [Wikipedia](#), [Public Domain](#).

Sheila Watt-Cloutier

The Right to Be Cold



One Woman's Fight to
Protect the Arctic and
Save the Planet from
Climate Change

Foreword by
Bill McKibben

“It was difficult for [representatives from warm countries] to grasp the fact that ice is something that people depend on not just for survival but to thrive . . . Because as hard as it is for many people to understand, for us Inuit, ice matters. *Ice is life.*”

--Sheila Watt-Cloutier (2015)

Othello (1601-3)

5.2

LODOVICO [*to IAGO*] O Spartan dog,
355 More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea,
 Look on the tragic loading of this bed:
 This is thy work. The object poisons sight.
 Let it be hid. —Graziano, keep the house,
 And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,
360 For they succeed on you. [*to CASSIO*] To you, Lord Governor,
 Remains the censure of this hellish villain:
 The time, the place, the torture—oh, enforce it.
 Myself will straight aboard, and to the state
 This heavy act with heavy heart relate. *Exeunt.*

Merci!



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lduckert@udel.edu