

Shakespeare's misogyny, myxophobia, and ecophobia: corporeality and environment

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Abstract *The clear entanglements between misogyny and environmental crises in Shakespeare find expression through myxophobia, a fear of slime. Because it is a border-crossing, element-defying matter that generates fear and disgust, matter that threatens degeneration and dissolution even as it remains fundamental to the origins and continuance of life, slime is elemental to theorizing about both misogyny and ecophobia. In discussing the early modern period, the most convenient point of entry to these topics is through the vagina.*

Keywords *misogyny, myxophobia, ecophobia, vaginophobia, Shakespeare*

Shakespeare's texts highlight an early modern contempt for women that centers on corporeal deliquescence. It is a misogyny that clearly entangles myxophobia (fear of slime) with issues of control and ecophobia. It is a misogyny borne out of a contempt for women's agencies (including sexual), a contempt that often finds its locus in the materialities of the vagina. It is a misogyny complicated by the highly charged ambivalences and genderings of slime. The environmental implications of this vaginophobic, myxophobic misogyny, particularly with regard to causes and effects on environmental crises, warrant consideration because contempt for the corporeality of women is at root a contempt for Nature. The resulting derogations of the natural environment have uneven effects. Women are the victims more often than not, both in the early modern period and today,

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yet it is the very process of patriarchal victimization that is in part behind the environmental crises that themselves have unequal effects.

Since 1998, when the first published instance where the words “Shakespeare” and “ecocriticism” appeared together (see Estok 1998,135, n.39), the field of “Shakespeare and ecocriticism” has become flooded with scholarship. For all of this, however, there is little in the way of scholarship linking early modern women and, say, climate. There are important links that need seeing.

It is clear that the early modern period pictured men and women very differently in terms of their fluidity. Many scholars have written on this matter. Gail Kern Paster makes clear that in “early modern English culture’s complex articulation of gender,” it is “the weaker vessel as leaky vessel” (24) that is the dominant notion. Paster explains that

this discourse inscribes women as leaky vessels by isolating one element of the female body’s material expressiveness—its production of fluids—as excessive, hence either disturbing or shameful. It also characteristically links this liquid expressiveness to excessive verbal fluency. In both formations, the issue is women’s bodily self-control or, more precisely, the representation of a particular kind of uncontrol as a function of gender. (25)

Clearly one of the issues here has to do with the imagined threat of “uncontrolled” female agency—verbal and sexual; but there is something else going on here. Drawing on a treatise published in 1601 by essayist Pierre Charron (one of the disciples of Montaigne), Sophie Chiari maintains that “with their vapours, humours, and fluids, men and women’s bodies were . . . comparable to small, independent weather systems. Human passions were liquids saturating the body and in need of control, a little like torrential rains threatening to flood the land” (15). This is an insight with profound implications, since if bodies are weather systems writ small, then weather systems are bodies writ large. What this means is that weather systems (and, by implication, climate) are gendered. In order to understand why *this* is important, it is necessary to understand the slimic imagination.

Slime registers differently according to time and place, obviously, and what is disgusting in one time and place may not be so in another—even in another moment. Desired, for instance, by men during sex as a lubricant, slime is a very

different matter post-ejaculation. As William Ian Miller explains in his encyclopaedic *The Anatomy of Disgust*, “semen is of all sex-linked disgust substances the most revolting to *men*: not because it shares a pathway with urine, not even because it has other primary disgust features (it is slimy, sticky, and viscous), but because it appears under conditions that are dignity-destroying, a prelude to the mini-shames attendant on post-ejaculatory tristesse” (103-104). However it registers, slime is all about the body and our anxieties, activities, and experiences with it.

Jean-Paul Sartre offers one of the few serious early theoretical investigations of slime, and his meditations get to the heart of slime’s ambivalence. Sartre maintains that slime is matter “whose materiality must on principle remain non-meaningful” (Sartre 772). It is this principle that makes slime an utterly ambivalent site, and this ambivalence makes slime both the matter of fascination to children and matter to which they “show repulsion” (ibid). Sartre’s theoretical discussions of slime are unique, compelling, and informative: “Sliminess proper, considered in its isolated state,” he argues, “will appear to us harmful in practice” (771). Slime is a threat. It threatens boundaries, and “the slimy appears as already the outline of a fusion of the world with myself” (773). It is an utterly ambiguous material: “immediately the slimy reveals itself as essentially ambiguous,” and “nothing testifies more clearly to its ambiguous character as a ‘substance between two states’ than the slowness with which the slimy melts into itself” (774). Slime is a dangerous transcorporeal matter that threatens the very boundaries that it traverses. Kelly Hurley has explained that

Nothing illustrates the Thing-ness of matter so admirably as slime. Nor can anything illustrate the Thing-ness of the human body so well as its sliminess, or propensity to become-slime. Slimy substances—excreta, sexual fluids, saliva, mucus—seep from the borders of the body, calling attention to the body’s gross materiality. [T. H.] Huxley’s description of protoplasm indicates that sliminess is the very essence of the body, and is not just exiled to its borders. Within an evolutionist narrative, human existence has its remote origins in the “primordial slime” from which all life was said to arise. (4)

Seeping from the borders but not exiled to the borders, at the core and origin of the body and yet a matter of profound disgust and horror,¹ slime is beyond our command, is not the water we so proudly control in our fountains and dams:²

indeed, as Sartre so colorfully puts it, “slime is the agony of water. It presents itself as a phenomenon in the process of becoming; it does not have the permanence within change that water has but on the contrary represents an accomplished break in a change of state. This fixed instability in the slimy discourages possession” (774). It can neither be possessed nor controlled, and, unsurprisingly, fears about slime are entangled with sexism and misogyny—each, to differing degrees, obsessed with power and control. And perhaps no one illustrates this better than Sartre himself.

Despite their breathtaking originality, Sartre’s comments entirely ignore the gendering of slime. Sartre’s gender “silence” has not gone unnoticed, and he has been called down for not only missing the chance to comment upon gender but of himself articulating sexist positions in his comments on slime. Constance Mui, for instance, argues that there is “unmistakably sexist language in Sartre’s discussions of the slimy and the hole, which he associates with the breast and the vagina, organs that are distinctively female” (31). Whether or not Sartre is, as Mui claims in an *ad hominem* attack, a “grumbling misogynist” (31), the language of *Being and Nothingness* is clearly damning. Hazel Barnes has put it well: “There can be no doubt that a full investigation of the linguistic codes in Sartre’s writing would reveal him to be a man comfortably ensconced in a world of male dominance” (341); but Barnes—like Margery Collins and Christine Pierce (whose pioneering “Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre’s Psychoanalysis” made the first claim about sexist language in *Being and Nothingness*), and like Mui also—suggests that the sexist contingencies of the language “are [weaknesses that are] at variance with the central philosophy” of the text itself. Barnes explains that “the sexism is there but is contingent, relevant to our appraisal of the writer but not essential to our judgment on the philosophy and its potential value as a support to feminism” (341). Mui ironically defends Sartrean philosophy as essentially antisexist (ironic because she does so at least in part through an *ad hominem* attack): “One cannot infer from the sexist analogies of slime and holes the claim that woman occupies an inferior ontological status. To do so would be to overlook the delightful irony in his ontology: in spite of *his ill feelings toward woman*, woman nevertheless prevails as a full-fledged consciousness in that ontology” (32, *emphasis added* on *ad hominem* comment). Yet, it is neither what he does in his personal life with women nor his anti-sexist postures in various parts of *Being and Nothingness* that is at issue here: what is at issue are his sexist comments about slime. The cherry-picking by scholars seeking to exonerate Sartre of sexism results in pure nonsense. It is sham scholarship to say “X pleases

me but Y—even though it contradicts X—is irrelevant.” To call Sartre’s sexist comments ‘contingencies of language’ is to miss the point entirely, rather like saying that rape and clitorectomies are contingencies of culture. Sadly, this is what apologists for Sartre do. Better to get on with it. Better to acknowledge that he clearly wants to support a feminist position but is equally clearly unable to do so. Slime “is like a leech sucking me” (773), Sartre explains, adding that “it is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking” (776). Woman as leech? This is sexism enough, but he goes on. Having associated slime with “feminine sucking,” he then associates it with “the possessed . . . dog” (ibid), “a poisonous possession” (ibid), a “snare” (ibid), “a sickly-sweet feminine revenge” (777), and a “sugary death” (ibid). Implicitly, these are all a part of the feminine sucking that slime is for him. The images Sartre uses in association with women—feminine sucking, possessed dog, revenge, and death—are deeply misogynistic.

Slime for Sartre is thoroughly enmeshed with the fear of women’s bodies and sexuality³ and with implicit fantasies of violence. The trajectory from early modern myxophobia and misogyny to Sartre couldn’t be clearer. The early modern colonial imagination is fraught with sexist fears about women’s agency, an agency that is uniformly located in the genitals. Shakespeare indeed offers a great many descriptions of female genitalia, often implicitly and in relation to the land⁴—whence, the “loathsome pit” of *Titus Andronicus* (2.3.193), the “sulphurous pit” of *King Lear* (4.6.125), and the “cold valley-fountain” of *Sonnet 153* (1.4). The images are far from uniform, ranging from the “no thing” between a fair maid’s legs of *Hamlet* (3.2.121)—perhaps out of which derives that “indistinguished space of woman’s will” (*King Lear* 4.6.271)—to the “the dark and vicious place” in which Gloucester begot Edmund in *King Lear* (5.3.173). In the early modern male imagination, the vagina is a place of fluids and slimes that when released cause corruption, rot, and poisoning.⁵ It is a place that provokes fear and disgust among men, with nothing less than biblical authority promoting the idea (see, for instance, *Isaiah* 64:6). It is perhaps, therefore, something of an understatement to claim that “there was a degree of animosity towards the vagina in the early modern period” (Alberti). This animosity is evident in one of the greatest tragedies ever written: *King Lear*.

Perhaps it is possible to write off Lear’s vaginophobia, just as it is possible to dismiss Sartre’s sexism, as a contingency, but both actions are counter-productive and are clearly not in the interests of feminism. Lear, disgusted almost to the

point of speechlessness, rants about what he sees as the most dangerous thing in women:

Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
 Though women all above.
 But to the girdle do the gods inherit.
 Beneath is all the fiends'; there's hell, there's darkness,
 There's the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding,
 Stench, consumption! Fie, fie, fie! Pah! pah! (4.6.121-26)

The disgust here is palpable. It grows not merely out of the *vagina dentate* misogyny, a fear of loss of masculine control to the sexual volition of women, a fear that dates back to the ancient Greeks; rather, this disgust is a more profound existential worry that the vagina engenders in men—a fear of envelopment, death, and dissolution, a fear that grows out of a kind of myxophobia. As Robert Rawdon Wilson explains in *The Hydra's Tale: Imagining Disgust*, “slime suggests something . . . that has degenerated. Slime is disgusting because it is uncertain, a phase in the dissolution of existence” (64). The threat of degeneration that slime poses is perhaps a part of the ecophobic vision of the return of Nature (about which I wrote in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*). It is a “vision of a Nature that will finally conquer humanity, reclaim all of the world, and remain long after we are gone” (Estok 2018, 66).⁶ And it is an inevitability that we will eventually die and decompose and become slime. When the carcass of a Grey Whale that had obviously been at sea for at least a fortnight washed up on Texada Island off the coast of British Columbia in late June of 2021, just in time for the most extreme heatwave in the recorded history of the area, a process of uneasy crossing from one state to another—a degeneration and dissolution from whale to not-whale—began. After only a few days in such heat, the carcass had become so slimy that the bald eagles, even with claws that can grab salmon out of whitewater, couldn't stand long on the body without slipping off. It is the slime to which every human is also slipping as the clock ticks on and on. The stench was profound, and no human would dare to eat of the slime that the birds and sea wolves so readily took as their feasts. That slime would kill us. There are indeed undoubtedly solid evolutionary reasons for myxophobia; yet, myxophobia misunderstands the centrality of slime, its elemental importance in life—all life, including human. Kelly Hurley explains it thus: “the human body at [its] basic level (one imperceptible to the ordinary working of the senses) is a quasi-differentiated mass, pulsing and viscous” (34). Even so, slime is the apogee of an imagined hostile

agential elementality, one that infects and kills. It is an elemental agency that we imbue with volition. We picture slime as the consummate agent of infection and rot. As entangled with ecophobic fears of nonhuman biological agency as it is with nonbiotic agencies, slime is the unrecognized elemental intruder, the border-crosser *par excellence* whose space is as ambivalent as can be. “Slime,” Shakespearean Dan Brayton reminds us, “occupies the conceptual space where the human imagination begins to grasp, tentatively and tenuously, the materiality of life itself” (Brayton 2015, 81). Slime refuses containment, inhabiting sites of disgust and horror as readily as it does sites of eroticism and joy. It is no less the harbinger of life and well-being than of death and disease. Even its elementality is ambivalent. It is the imagined unpredictable and uncontainable agency, however, that makes slime inherently political. It is the agency of slime that produces fear, but it is not merely that there is a history of sexist renderings of slime with women: we need also to understand the gendered dimensions of rot and disgust.

Rot and disgust are invariably linked with both ecophobia and misogyny, and these are resolutely bounded in corporeal terms in Shakespeare. If Leonard Tennenhouse is correct to urge that early modern tragedy “defines the female body as a source of pollution . . . [and that] any sign of permeability automatically endangers the community” (117-8), then the female rape victim becomes a site of pollution (as Ophelia’s tousled hair perhaps signifies), and the woman with her own sexuality is also a site of pollution (and a threat to the patriarchal hegemony). Primarily the transgression of culturally significant boundaries, bodily orifices being one such set of boundaries, pollution becomes matter of both gender and environment. Texts represent women as sites of pollution perhaps, as Linda Woodbridge explains, because “women have more orifices than men to start with, which may be why the female body offers the more frequent image of society endangered” (52). Yet, there is obviously much more going on in the gendering of pollution than official politics. If the world is dirty and disgusting for Hamlet, like “the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,/ Stew’d in corruption” (3.4.92-3),⁷ then it is the slimic source of that corruption in all of its misogynistic implications that compels Hamlet—as it does Lear—to strut and fret and vent.

It is not just that the social world is rotten to the core, at a time in history “when the universal belief in analogy and correspondence made it normal to discern in the animal world a mirror image of human social and political organization” (Thomas 61); the “foul and pestilent congregation of vapours” (*Hamlet* 2.2.302-

3)⁸ arise from the feminized space of Nature, a space in which “animals seem to occupy a more honorable place than women,” as Jeanne Addison Roberts argued in *The Shakespearean Wild* (57). This feminized space of nature, “the natural world[,] becomes a place where proper distinctions between people can be lost, based on the tendency to tar all women with the same brush that we see in Hamlet, who may not taint his mind against his mother, but whose sense of feminine frailty muddies his attitude to Ophelia” (64). It is significant that the space of nature is not only feminized but that it is “treated with extraordinary ambivalence [in Shakespeare]. It was considered the ground of all that was good, but at the same time the basis of all bad” (MacFaul 15). Moreover, as Tom MacFaul succinctly notes, “nature is excessive” (2) in Shakespeare.⁹

The metaphors Hamlet uses are very telling. Whenever he talks about difference, his thoughts eventually devolve upon some form of rot. For instance, evil resides in excess,¹⁰ and people are bad only

By their o’ergrowth of some complexion, / . . . /
 Or by some habit, that too much o’erleavens
 The form of plausible manners . . . these men / . . . /
 Shall in the general censure take corruption
 From that particular fault. (1.4.27-36)

The problem is *not* “one defect” or “particular fault,” since nobody is perfect; the problem is the “o’ergrowth” of such a “complexion.” Excess (and eventually rot), then, is the problem, and it is defined with naturalistic imagery. For Hamlet, the social world is rotten to the core, and the natural world “but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours” (2.2.302-3). Hamlet is obsessed with rot, with “rank corruption, mining all within, [that]/ Infects unseen” (3.4.150-1), with “the sun breed[ing] maggots in a dead dog” (2.2.181), and such issues. This is a man whose strong concerns with purifying his social world results in a discursive putrefying of the natural world. His world is, metaphorically speaking, filthy and rotting, polluted beyond repair.

In *The Hydra’s Tale*, Robert Wilson identifies a “thin drizzle of filth that rains constantly upon the fictional world of *Hamlet*” (10-11)—a drizzle we might be more inclined to see as a torrential downpouring of rot and decay—and argues that the text repeatedly, though not explicitly, imagines disgust. It is disgust that more often than not grows out of rotten environments. We know the famous explanation that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (1.4.90), and while the word

“rotten” is metaphorical here, suggesting perhaps more about moral turpitude than about green issues, the play consistently conceptualizes the disgusting *as* Nature (a Nature that is also gendered female), which is essentially disordered in this text. For instance, Hamlet’s description of his world is of “an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature/ Possess it merely” (1.2.135-7).¹¹ In a play that sees human disorder in environmental terms, permanence is ugly, and “brevity is the soul of wit” (2.2.90) and beauty. Excess is ugly, and, again, if the period defines women through metaphors of excess, then clearly there are entanglements of sexism and ecophobia here. The “violet in the youth of primy nature/ Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting” (1.3.7-8) is acceptable, good, and beautiful; gardens rankly overgrown in this play poison “the whole ear of Denmark” (1.5.36), and the “fat weed/ That roots itself in ease” (1.5.32-3) in this garden is Claudius, whose “offence is rank, it smells to heaven” (3.3.36). The sweet “rose of May” (4.5.157), Ophelia, becomes a site/sight of floral excess, bedecked with “fantastic garlands . . . / Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples” (4.7.167-8). Unsurprisingly, it is the woman who suffers, Ophelia becoming “a document in madness” (4.5.176). She is Other, and environmental excess in *Hamlet* is a finger pointing directly at this variety of Otherness.

What makes rot of such concern to theories about ecophobia is—among other things—its imagined unpredictability, its willy-nilly transgressions and blurring of borders, and its perceived alliance with an antagonistic Nature. Slime is elemental here. Slime is the transgression of all transgressions, of water—the very basis of life—to something else. The transgression of water to slime itself is ironically the very basis of life. Slime is the Texada Island whale gone not-whale. As a transgression *par excellence*, slime slips outside of the cultural categories that define the known, the safe, and the normal and falls squarely (as squarely as slime can fall) into the category of what Noel Carroll defines as horror: “what horrifies is that which lies outside cultural categories” (35). More than simply a transgression of categories, a degeneration or dissolution, say from life to death, from growth to decay, from the known and the safe to the unknown and the horrific; “what disgusts, startlingly, is also the very capacity for life” (Miller 40) that slime promises—the very promise that women possess but men do not. The promise of life in the face of death is an agency men simply lack.

Death “was all too real a problem in the climate crisis of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (MacFaul 162), and starvation from extreme weather is

very real in Shakespeare's time and in his plays. The climate crises of his day, like the climate crises of our own, are far from gender neutral, either in cause or effect. Whether it is Prospero in *The Tempest* controlling the weather, controlling the indigenous inhabitant of the island, and controlling his own daughter,¹² or Lear railing against the storm (which he cannot control) in the much the same way that he rages and rails against his daughters (whom he also cannot control), misogyny is inextricable from climate in Shakespeare. The trajectory from Shakespeare to the twenty-first century is so palpable that some of the comments about climate change could as easily be from today as from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play that has one of the women stating that

the winds, piping to us in vain,
 As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
 Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
 Have every pelting river made so proud
 That they have overborne their continents:
 The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
 The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
 Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;
 The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
 And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;
 The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
 And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
 For lack of tread are undistinguishable:
 The human mortals want their winter here;
 No night is now with hymn or carol blest:
 Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
 Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
 That rheumatic diseases do abound:
 And thorough this distemperature we see
 The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
 Far in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
 And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
 An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
 Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
 The childing autumn, angry winter, change
 Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
 By their increase, now knows not which is which:

And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are their parents and original. (2.1.88-117)

It is time to listen to Shakespeare's women and what they say—especially as our climate crises worsen.

Note

¹ Noël Carroll argues that there is a “tendency in horror novels and stories to describe monsters in terms of and to associate them with filth, decay, deterioration, slime and so on. The monster in horror fiction, that is, is not only lethal but—and this is of utmost significance—also disgusting” (22).

² I have often thought that the reason people are so fascinated by fountains has to do with control. Fountains offer the possibility of chaos, the threat of disorder in the very moment that they carefully choreograph every splash and movement of water. Like our childhood fascination with heavy snow and leaf-strewn autumnal streets that temporarily obscure human order, fountains remind us of natural agency (particularly of water), and it is a powerful and potentially deadly agency. Our control over water, it seems, is rarely complete and is often fraught with ambivalence. On a visit to the Three Gorges Dam in 2008, the ambivalence of the visitors (Chinese and foreign) toward the massive structure hailed as a “taming of the Yangtze” was palpable, a taming that cost 200 lives in onsite casualties and displaced more than 1.2 million people.

³ Greta Gaard usefully discusses this fear of sexuality (erotophobia) in relation to sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia (1997) as well as in relation to ecophobia: “erotophobia is . . . a component of ecophobia” (Gaard 2010: 650); “ecophobia and erotophobia are intertwined concepts” (Gaard 2011: 1).

⁴ It is easy to locate misogynistic fears about women being associated with geographies of difference in the early modern period. The search for the City of Gold (El Dorado), for instance, led to “the site of the feared Amazons, warrior women who symbolized the region’s nature as an aggressive and challenging feminine entity” (Jaramillo 92).

⁵ In her *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, Sarah Read offers meticulous discussions of the early modern notion that menstrual blood and excretions were corrupting and poisonous. See pp. 24-38 (“Introduction: ‘Those Sweet and Benign Humours That Nature Sends Monthly’: Reading Menstruation and Vaginal Bleeding”) in particular.

⁶ The theme has become more and more frequent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It all may seem innocent enough, a mere comment on Nature’s resilience—perhaps even a celebration of it. Roberto Marchesini describes “the theme of nature taking up the spaces abandoned by the human being, in line with the descriptions of the ecological transformations that took place in Chernobyl, returns in many videos shared on social media showing deer, badgers, wolves and bears walking peacefully through the city streets” (Marchesini 2021, 15). Yet, these images—like those in the 2007 film *I Am Legend*, as in the Animal Planet/Discovery Channel’s joint production of the CGI series *The Future is Wild* (2003), Alan Weisman’s 2007 book *The World Without Us*, the History Channel’s *Life After People* (January 2008), and the

National Geographic Channel's *Aftermath: Population Zero* (March 2008)—remind us of our unimportance. The opening epigraph of the Weisman book is itself horrifying:

Das Firmament blaut ewig, und die Erde
Wird lange fest steh'n und aufblüh'n im Lenz.
Du aber, Mensch, wie lange lebst denn du?

(The firmament is blue forever, and the Earth
Will long stand firm and bloom in spring.
But, man, how long will you live?)
(Li-Tai-Po/Hans Bethge/Gustav Mahler, *The Chinese Flute: Drinking Song of the Sorrow of the Earth*, Das Lied von der Erde, cited by Weisman 2007, preliminary matter).

⁷ The enseamed bed here is Gertrude's, and it is eminently disgusting, rotten, and dirty to Hamlet because it flies in the face of the kind of order that Hamlet would have wished to have seen maintained.

⁸ Correspondences between the natural and social worlds are indeed abundant in Shakespeare, from the disorderly and carnivalesque world of the witches in *Macbeth*, with their "fog and filthy air" (1.1.11), to the proclamations of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*, where we are given the rhetorical question asking

What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture? (1.3.97-101)

In his next breath, Ulysses gives the answer: "O, when this degree is shaken,/ Which is the ladder of all high designs,/ The enterprise is sick" (ll.101-3). Disorder in the natural world is disorder in the social world.

⁹ MacFaul's arguments, however, are inconsistent at time. He claims, for instance, "that Shakespeare's anthropocentrism is ultimately sufficiently decentering to avoid ecophobia" (p.11, n.38), and yet, as if having forgotten what he had written, talks about Shakespeare growing out of and being a part of a history of "despising" nature (22). Such a participation within such a history is the very definition of ecophobia.

¹⁰ We will remember from Paster that the early modern period associates women with excess.

¹¹ Weeds, of course, are a form of natural pollution (essentially, rot) in this play, and they are abundant. They define Nature in terms heavily inscribed with human investments. Imagined as having no practical value and as being detrimental to things that do have practical value, weeds in this play devalue all that they are associated with. They epitomize amoral luxuriance and anthropomorphize Nature as corrupt and rotten. They cross boundaries drawn for utilitarian purposes, and they are a threat because their order stands in defiance and challenge to human order. This is not to say that weeds were uniformly loathed in the early modern period. Indeed, a weed such as dandelion (also known as lion's tooth, bitterwort, wild endive, priest's crown, piss-a-bed, Irish daisy, blow

ball, yellow gowan, puffball, clock flower, swine snout, fortune-teller, and cankerwort) is a frequent guest in the many herbals of the time and which were commonly available. Among these are the *Book of Sovereigne Approved Medicines and Remedies* (1577), a catalogue of medicines and methods for their preparation approved by the government and readily available in England; William Turner's *A New Herball* (1551); Banckes' *An Herball* (1525); Sir Thomas Elyot's 1541 *Castel of Helth*; Thomas Moulton's 1540 *This is the myroure or glasse of helthe*, among many published works detailing common medical practices with what are in other forum called weeds.

¹² Karen Warren (among many others) has convincingly explained that there are “important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other” (“Introduction” xi). It is front-and-center in *The Tempest*, where Prospero manipulates the weather, the island's indigenous inhabitant, and Miranda (Ferdinand too, to be sure, but only so that he can control his daughter).¹² For Prospero, Caliban is a resource that is indistinguishable from the land, as are women, including his own daughter.

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