The Economy of Nature: Human and Non-Human Forces in Shakespeare's King Lear and Timon of Athens

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DR. HANSEN
Well good evening, everyone. My name is Matt Hansen, I'm an associate professor of English, in the English department here at Boise State University. And it's really my great pleasure to introduce our speaker for this evening, Dr. Peter Remien. Dr. Remien finished his Ph.D. at the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2012, and in 2013 he joined the faculty at Lewis and Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho. So he's part of our wonderful collection of Idaho Scholars Talks around Shakespeare's first folio during the month that we have it here. Dr. Remien teaches a wide variety of courses at Lewis and Clark State College although in his heart and in his research is primarily a scholar of 17th century English literature and he gets pressed into duty to teach Medieval Literature and Shakespeare, of course. But also first year writing and British Literature survey courses and a wide variety of courses for the students at Lewis and Clark State College. In the short time that since he's completed his Ph.D. work he has been incredibly active and prolific scholar, publishing in a number of really impressive venues, including Spencer Studies, ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment, Studies in Philology, Modern Philology, and he was telling me on the way over for the talk this evening has just recently had a paper accepted for publication in PMLA the proceedings of the Modern Language Association. So one of the major places that scholars of literature and language can find a home for their work. So it's really a great pleasure to have him as one of our colleagues here tonight from Idaho and to come down from Lewiston and to speak with us tonight. The talk that he's going to share with us tonight is in part, part of a larger book project that he's currently engaged in that's concerned with the economy of nature in early modern England. And in that work he traces a genealogy of ecology in 17th century literature and natural philosophy. And so tonight he's going to take us through some of those more general parameters and then work us more narrowly down into some ideas that focus on King Lear and ultimately Timon of Athens one of Shakespeare's plays that was — some of us were talking earlier on and we might characterize as the unnecessary Shakespeare or Shakespeare's B-sides, some of those plays that kind of reach further in the back. Definitely not the, kind of, top 5 or top 10 that everybody has on their fingertips in terms of having seen multiple productions and multiple film versions of and things like that. And in some ways that makes it an even more rich and rare gem as a result of it. So his talk this evening is The Economy of
Thank you so much for that really generous introduction. And thank you so much for inviting me to be here today. And I can only imagine how much work that my host Dr. Matt Hansen put into putting together all of this programming around the First Folio and I imagine a lot of other people into this wonderful exhibit. I'm excited to be here kind of, in the presence of the folio, it has what Walter Benjamin referred to as, kind of, an aura. That's been, kind of, diminished in modern mechanically reproduced works. So, I'm here to talk, kind of, — I'm going to start out my talk by, kind of, of speaking broadly about my own research and, kind of, broadly about ideas of the natural world in Early Modern England ideas that Shakespeare espouses in his works and his contemporaries espoused. And then I'm going to turn more generally to Shakespeare's works. And one note I might make is you can see in my title I've, kind of, I've tweaked the spelling I'm spelling economy in the Early Modern way and what I'm trying to do is de-familiarize the concept to emphasize how Early Modern economy differs very much from contemporary versions of the term. Okay, so right. My talk; The Economy of Nature. As the First Folio heads west, traversing the Rocky Mountains to travel from Boulder, Colorado to Boise, Idaho, where it now sits next to sagebrush desert and mountain foothills, it is worth reflecting on this unlikely journey. These Western American landscapes with their endless snowy peaks and vast deserts would have been all but unthinkable to Shakespeare, whose England was already largely forested by the 16th century. Pressures of a rapidly growing populations increasingly centered in urban areas, intensified the agricultural appropriation of much of the English countryside in the 16th and 17th centuries. Every acre of England must be proved, as contemporary agrarian writers like Gervase Markham put it. The folio like some of the most beautiful and unique parts of the American landscape were thought worthy of preservation. Shakespeare's plays, like the sprawling landscapes of the American West, evoke boundless possibility. But the impulse to preserve wild places would have been alien to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Royal hunting preserves existed but there was little sense of the natural world's intrinsic value Aside from its usefulness to human beings, particularly those in power. Wilderness remain for Shakespeare and his contemporaries a largely pejorative term, synonymous with waste. Wilderness was land that had not yet been put to proper use. Toward the end of Henry IV part II for example Henry, approaching his death bed, worries about the fate of the kingdom, in the hands of his dissolute son, Prince Hal, who we all know and love, "Oh thou will be a wilderness again. Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants", Henry says. Titus Andronicus similarly bemoans that, "Rome is but a wilderness of tigers." For Shakespeare, wilderness remains not a representation that's not transcendental beauty as it does
for John Muir as an early promoter of America's National Parks, but rather the degradation of
civil society. Shakespeare's more positive view of the natural world, explored in a number of
recent studies is usually centered not on untrammeled nature, but on the intersection of human
kind in the natural world. The modern critical movement of Eco Criticism and that is literary
scholarship informed by the science of ecology and broadly by the politics of environmentalism
has generated productive new ways of understanding Shakespeare's works. Scholars now study
the physical trees used to manufacture Shakespeare's Globe Theatre alongside those forest
depicted in plays like As You Like It, Marry Wives of Windsor, and A Midsummer Night's
Dream. Eco critics also study the air and water pollution that were regular features of
Shakespeare's London and the ecologically diverse global ocean that Shakespeare's society was
only beginning to understand. And yet, the critical vocabulary of modern ecology and
environmentalism was not available to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. German botanist
Ernst Haeckel coined the term ecology in German in 1866, over 250 years after Shakespeare's
death. And the concept didn't come into wide use until the 20th century. Rachel Carson's 1962
Silent Spring is sometimes credited with introducing the word ecology to a mass audience.
Likewise, the word environment did not assume its modern sense of the physical surroundings
or conditions in which a person or other organism lives — as the Oxford English Dictionary's
definition 1b. Until the 19th century — and any idea of the environment, as in the collective
natural world did not develop until the 20th century. In other words, our own ways of
understanding and representing the natural world were not available to Shakespeare and his
contemporaries. And, thus, his vision of nature was very different from our own. Even ideas
of nature or the natural were, for Shakespeare, fraught with a complexity that resists any simple
equation with the natural world. Indeed, Raymond Williams refers to nature as, "perhaps the
most complex word in the language" and uses a number of quotations from Shakespeare's King
Lear as examples of nature's complexity. Williams notes that in King Lear and I quote, "nature
was at once innocent, unprovided, sure, unsure, fruitful, destructive, a pure force, and tainted
and cursed." The real complexity of natural processes has been rendered by a complexity
within a single term. How, then, did Shakespeare and his contemporaries conceptualize the
natural world? In a monograph book project I am now completing, a chapter of which is
forthcoming in PMLA, I argue that Early Modern notions of economy or household
management supply a key to thinking about the collective functioning of the non-human world
in the Early Modern imaginations. Economy from the Greek oikos nomos and I have some
notes on the overhead, literally means the managing of the household, and referred not to the
collective financial activities of nations or other large aggregates, but rather to the management
of the individual household and the surrounding estate. Ideas of good economy were central to
the work of Xenophon and Aristotle whose works were translated into English and published
during Shakespeare's life. Aristotle's translator Louis Leroy translates economy as natural
acquisition and contrasts it with chrematistic, which means the unnatural pursuit of wealth for wealth's sake. The idea is that economy is defined by biological necessity the good householder strives to have enough and not too much. Very much Aristotle's sense of the golden mean. Modern sense of economical is very much to the point. Economy as a concept linked people to the plants, animals, and soil that sustained them. Good economy involved the sustainable utilization of the local environment, while keeping in check the kinds of excessive desires that compromise the estates resources and in England, if you owned a large estate, a ready source of money for you — of liquid assets — would be deforesting the estate. So this would be a principle that would gain you wealth but it would violate good economy. Economy was also, it turns out, detachable from the human sphere. Shakespeare and his contemporaries represented the natural world itself as functioning with economy event without human intervention. The idea was often routed through theological notions of divine providence. The idea is that god designed the world so perfectly that it functions with economic precision. Reformation theologian Pierre Viret praises the house holding of animals in his 1585 treatise, the school of beasts, entitled The Good House Holder or The Economics. And I have the title page of this really fairly obscure treatise that I discuss in my book. Perhaps the most compelling reason, though, that eco-critics should pay attention to Early Modern economy is that the concept is proto-ecological in a strict sense. In 1964 [sic], natural philosopher Sir Kenelm Digby — pictured here and this is an engraving based on a beautiful portrait by Anthony Van Dycke. Kenelm Digby transformed the human discourse of economy into a natural philosophical principle. Digby argued that the natural world functioned according to the principles of the economy of nature. Digby writes in two treatises, which is a comprehensive account of the physical world, that — and I put this quote on here and it's a little — this is a document that — it's not as interesting to read as Shakespeare but I would argue is important to the history of ideas and the history of science. He writes that "bodies that of themselves have no propensions unto any determined place; do nevertheless move constantly and perpetually one way; the dense one descending and the rare ones ascending: not by any intrinsicall quality that worketh upon them; but by the oeconomy of nature, that hath set on foot due and plain causes to produce known effects" Digby's rejection of intrinsical quality the innate principles of motion residing in natural objects, locates agency in environmental dispensation. Like the house holder nature arranges an environment as a system designed to produce predictable results, setting on foot agents that, steward-like, ensure the orderly functioning of the natural economy. This system articulates itself against Aristotelian teleology, the idea that things have innate qualities of motion residing within them — depending on what kind of bodies they are. But it also eschews the mechanism of Digby's friend and colleague Renee Descartes, the economy of nature is a subtler mechanism of the physics of life capable of describing nature's regularity, but in gross, without transforming nature into a machine. And this is the natural
philosophical concept that I argue is an important proto-ecological idea. But, of course, Digby doesn't articulate this concept until well after Shakespeare's death. A little bit more about this and then I'll move into Shakespeare. For Digby nature functioned like a human household with thrift, regularity, and efficiency. Each and every thing had its proper place with the ultimate goal of ceaseless productivity. While this system was divinely inspired, agency in the economy of nature was dispersed throughout the creation. Nature was a system in which the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. And I'll talk a little bit about these two quotations. So the economy of nature's social and political influences, which are largely submerged in two treatises, come to the surface in another treatise where he discusses this concept called A Discourse Concerning the Vegetation of Plants, which was composed shortly after the restoration of Charles the Second. And, by the way, Digby's a really interesting historical figure. His father was executed as part of the gunpowder plot. He was a devout catholic his whole life. And he lived in exile in Paris during the English civil war, where he met Renee Descartes and Margaret Cavendish and her husband William Cavendish and he also came back to England after the restoration and became a founding member of the Royal Society, which was the first, kind of, formal scientific — officially sanctioned scientific institution in England. So in this text, Digby describes "the confluence of processes in plant growth; moisture, sunlight, soil, and balsamick salt" — and Digby considers how "the whole oeconomy of nature conspireth to set here a period to the extension of the Plant" Despite the ostensible culmination of nature's effects, Digby emphasizes nature's ceaseless activity, "But when nature has set a period to the extent of her growing Plant, and is as it were weary of teeming any longer with such strong and nervous issues ... and yet never consenting to be idle and sit still, she betaketh herself to work of less robustruous force." Personifying nature in conventionally feminine terms Digby uses the presumed industriousness of the Early Modern house wife to convey nature's ceaselessness. Digby's economy of nature would later become foundational to the history of ecology in the 18th and 19th centuries in the works of Linnaeus, Charles Darwin, and Ernst Haeckel. The economy of nature was Charles Darwin's phrase for the collective functioning of the natural world. Darwin never uses the term ecology himself, though he's an important ecological thinker. And when Ernst Haeckel coins the term ecology in 1866 he used the economy of nature to define the nascent discipline. By ecology — and this is my quotation here — "By ecology we mean the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature — the investigations of the total relations of the animal both to its organic and its inorganic environment." The economy of nature which has its roots in the 17th century is clearly a formative concept in the history of ecology. I'll say the earlier part of this research is original — all of my research on Digby but since we can't do in-text citations in a talk, I'll say that my work relies very heavily on the work of a wonderful historian named Donald Worster. Okay, well Digby understands the economy of nature as a natural philosophical concept, it also clearly
draws on poetic conceits, something that was actually a source of anxiety for Digby because he was concerned that he was doing science and not writing poetry, right? He wasn't making things up. Indeed, Digby, who lived a generation after Shakespeare, was a prominent Edmond Spencer scholar and was Ben Johnson's patron and eventual literary executor. Ben Johnson was, of course, Shakespeare's contemporary and competitor and wrote the beautiful eulogy to Shakespeare titled The Memory of My Beloved William Shakespeare and What He Left Us, which is published in the prefatory material of the first folio, which sits in the room next to us. Unfortunately, though we can't flip to that to all look at it after this. I don't blame anybody for not letting everybody just flip through it. In my larger project I argue that Digby's characterization of nature draws images and overall structure from Ben Johnson's poetry. Which depicts productive sustainable but also unmistakably anthropocentric vision of the natural world. And Digby's characterization of the economy of nature also draws upon the more conventional poetic trope that I think most of us are aware of, common in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, of personifying nature as a goddess. The goddess Natura or sometimes just Nature with a capital N. Natural philosophy and poetry, therefore, find sometimes uneasy alliance in Digby's economy of nature. Like Early Modern economy, Early Modern poetry was understood to blend human and natural forces. For Sir Phillip Sidney, the poet — and I'm quoting from his Defense of Poesy — really the fist, kind of, detailed work of literary theory in English. "The poet goeth hand0in-hand with nature not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit." Indeed he argues that the poet improves upon natures gifts, and I quote again, "her world is brazen, the poet's only deliver a golden," And I think that Shakespeare was very aware of this sentiment. He's always aware — so Shakespeare is famous for his representation of the natural world but I think he's always aware of the rift between representation and anything like reality. Particularly those representations that draw upon conventional tropes. And more about this very soon. George Putnam who's another, kind of, famous writer on poetry — a theorist on poetry at the time — mirrors Sidney's sentiment in his comparison with the poet with other professions. And I quote Putnam now, "for in that he useth his metrical proportions by appointed harmonical measures and distances. He is like the carpenter or joiner, for borrowing their timbre and stuff of nature the appoint and order it by art otherwise the nature would do. And yet the poet also, like the gardener, harnesses nature's works." And I quote Putnam again, "In that he speaks figuratively, he argues subtly or persuades copiously and vehemently he doth as the cunning gardener that using nature as a co-aggitor furthers her inclusions and, many times, makes her conclusions more absolute and strange. The poet, even as nature herself," and I'm quoting again, "the poet, even as nature herself working by her own particular virtue and proper instinct and not by example or mediation or exercise as all other artificers do, is then most admired when he is most natural and least artificial." So Putnam — the poet for Putnam,
in other words, is a natural artificer. The underlying assumption was that language particularly
in its imaginative creation was a spontaneous and natural production, which is later given
artistic shape by poets and playwrights — and I think we get a little bit of this in the term
playwright, which students always misspell as ‘playrite’, r-i-t-e, r-i-t-e, but, of course it's a
playwright like a shipwright. Like a builder. This blending of nature and artistry is reflected in
the term anthology for a collection of poetry, which literally means a gathering of flowers.
Indeed, the Early Modern term poesy for poetry conflated the artistic and the botanical. George
Gascoigne's 1573 collection of poems, for example, is named — and I'm not going to read the
whole title, because as we may know, right, titles in the Early Modern period were often very
very long they'd be practically a whole paragraph. A Hundred Sundry Flowers Bound Up in
One Small Poesy, Gathered Partly by Translation in the Fine Outlandish Gardens of Euripides,
Ovid, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Others. And he goes on and talks about some of these come from
the fruitful orchards of England. Ben Johnson moreover, makes poetry an explicitly economic
endeavor. Trained as a bricklayer, Johnson's preferred metaphor for literary composition is
house building. And I'm quoting from Johnson's — a text called Timber or Discoveries, and
it's his commonplace book where — it's actually a book provides some contemporary insight
into Shakespeare including the insult — I might misremember it now — this is a little bit of an
aside but he never blotted a word would he have blotted a thousand — is that, anybody —
yeah, right. Shakespeare didn't edit like Johnson. Johnson's a really great figure I think he was,
kind of, a massive ego in the Renaissance. Okay. "The fable," and I'm quoting now from
Johnson, "The fable is called the imitation of one entire and perfect action whose parts are so
joined and knit together as nothing in the structure can be changed or taken away without
impairing or troubling the whole, of which there is a proportional magnitude in the members.
As for example, if a man would build a house, he would first appoint a place to build it in,
which he would define within certain bounds." And he goes on, he actually spends a large
paragraph with the analogy of house building and writing poem and he says, for example right,
if you were writing a very large poem like an epic you need a very large foundation. Johnson
also, I think, makes this, kind of, idea of writing poetry as physical construction even more
explicit in the collections of some of his poetry. Probably the most famous is titled The Forest.
Another is Under Woods and his commonplace book that I just mentioned is titled Timber.
The impression is that, like the house holder, Johnson physically constructs his poems out of
the raw materials provided by timber, provided by nature. It is no surprise that Johnson's
account of literary composition mirrors the ideas of economy — household management —
since economy was itself a literary term meaning — and I'm quoting the Oxford English
Dictionary here — "the structure arrangement or layout of a poem play or other work" The
great 17th century poet John Milton writes in the preface to his closet drama, Samson
Agonistes, "If the whole drama be found not produced beyond the fifth act of one style in
uniformity and the common and that commonly called the plot, whether intricate or explicit, which is nothing indeed but such economy or dispensation of the fable as may best stand with verisimilitude and decorum. Economy as a literary concept counter poses another agrarian metaphor used to understand literary production, Erasmus’ notion of the copia, that was a very popular idea when Shakespeare was writing a very popular idea particular, I think, in the 16th century. And that's the idea that essentially the greater the variety of literary devices the greater the poet. Economy on the other hand represents the proper government of the overall composition so as to meet the overall demands of proper decorum. The rule is not excess but control. So I argue that this two essentially agrarian, kind of, counter pose each other. They are, kind of, opposite ways of understanding literary composition. I've thus far been exploring three ideas of economy. All operative in the Early Modern period. All of which blend human and natural forces. The first, which we might call natural economy and they would have just called economy means household management and represents the biological interface between humanity and the natural world. In Shakespeare's largely agrarian society, the household management extended beyond the house to include the management of the surrounding pasturelands, orchards, and farms. And the important distinction to remember between Early Modern economy and Modern economy — or Early Modern household management and Modern household management, is that we think of the household as a place of consumption, right. It’s where we eat it’s where we consume much of the energy that we use. Whereas in the Early Modern period the household was much more a space of production. Both production and consumption. It was a working agrarian household. And usually there would be, kind of, a different — often handiworks were produced there. So they were almost like these kinds of working agrarian households. Almost like proto-factories. Okay, so the second sense of economy is the economy of nature. And it’s a scientific concept for understanding the collective functioning of the natural world. This version of economy is proto-ecological in a very strict sense. Because it’s that Linnaeus, Charles Darwin, and Ernst Haeckel used. And the third and final version of economy that I've been exploring is poetic. Economy represents the proper dispensation of a work of literature. Particularly a poem or play, so that it fits the rules of proper decorum. Economy often corresponds to a, kind of, literary realism though that's, kind of, and anachronistic term for talking about Shakespeare's period. So that what is found in the work corresponds with what we observe in the world. For the second half of my talk I'll turn to the works of William Shakespeare. First, I will speak of Shakespeare's literary engagement with the natural world broadly. Before focusing more closely on the intersection with my own scholarship in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's engagement with ideas of natural economy. Again since in-text citations are difficult in a spoken presentation, I should note that I'm drawing heavily upon a number of prominent scholars old and new. William Empson, Harry Berger Jr., Paul Alpers, Ken Hiltner, Jean Feerick, Laurie Shannon, Steve Mense, and Robert Watson.
And I'm missing a bunch — if you didn't hear your name, I'm sorry. It's very difficult to
generalize about Shakespeare. Of course, it goes without saying that Shakespeare is a famously
complex and sophisticated writer, who tends to explore ideas from multiple angles rather than
giving voice to any single political program, ideology, or even an aesthetic vision. Having said
this, however, I'll make a, kind of, broad statement. My broad sense is that Shakespeare
attempts to engage the tropes and motifs of Early Modern nature writing, and I'll talk about
those in a moment, largely ironically. He consistently employs and subverts georgic and
pastoral paradigms including what I refer to as natural economy, which I would argue in its
literary manifestations is essentially a version of georgic literature. Instead, what Shakespeare
produces is a view of the natural world as elusive, necessarily routed through human
subjectivity. It is a largely — it's a natural world that I think is largely indifferent to, or even
hostile to, human needs and desires. Okay, and finally — oh right, I forgot — it’s like, this is
a little bit about Ben Johnson's famous works. By the way, Ben Johnson's 1616 folio provides
a very important, kind of, forerunner to Shakespeare's folio. And what's interesting about
Johnson's complete works, is Johnson oversaw their production and publication. Where, right,
Shakespeare his works were published posthumously. And so this is, right, the folio that, kind
of, is the, kind of forerunner to Shakespeare's folio. Okay. So Early Modern ideas of nature
tend to emphasize intersection between human kind and the natural world. And we might even
say, right, their ideas of the artificial and the natural were fundamentally different from our
own. The ideal, in so much as there was one, was agrarian in nature. It was harmonious
interdependence, the properly managed garden rather than the untouched mountain forest.
Early Modern nature writing tended to draw upon the tropes and literary modes handed down
from Ancient Greece and Rome. The most prevalent of these were the pastoral and the georgic.
Both of which find their most influential forms in the writings of the Roman poet Virgil. As
Richard Halverson has pointed out, Virgil's career supplied the model, followed by England's
most ambitious poets both Spencer and Milton, self-consciously modeled their careers after
Virgil's beginning with the homely pastoral before progressing to the loftier epic. The pastoral
as a literary mode involves the life of shepherds in idyllic rural landscapes. While tensions
exist, nature tends to be broadly sympathetic to human needs and desires and even emotional
states. Rural life in the pastoral tends to be a life of ease and leisure, what they called 'otium.'
And even though its often tinged with a, kind of, painful nostalgia, a lot of times the shepherds
would have their hearts broken — as happened, right, to Spencer's Colin Clout. And this is a
famous woodcut engraving from Edmond Spencer's shepherd's calendar. And Spencer's
works, by the way, provide — Shakespeare was very aware of Spencer's works and he, likely,
drew upon Spencer when he was writing A Midsummer Night's Dream. Okay, so the georgic
is a distinct mode but it’s related to the pastoral. It involves the life of rural laborers. And I'm
afraid not to say a shepherd's not a laborer but the georgic was more about farming. It remains
more focused on the necessity of human labor rather than leisure. Nature still provides but it often demands very difficult human interventions. Environmentally minded scholars have really struggled to come to terms with these immensely influential literary modes. One problem is, as Paul Alpers puts it, "pastoral writing are notoriously conventional." Indeed, Alpers argues that the pastoral is not about nature at all, but is really much more about its own conventionality. How is the literary mode supposed to represent the natural world if it is bound to a pre-defined set of tropes, characters, landscapes, and attitudes? The kinds of American nature writing valorized by ecocritics like Lawrence Buell and Scott Slovick — and I should mention that Idaho is becoming a, kind of, center for ecocriticism — Scott Slovick is now a chair at University of Idaho. So ecocritics tended to valorize the works of writers like Henry David Thoreau, Barry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, whose writings tend to emphasize the close observation and documentation of the natural world. Usually of wild nature. But the pastoral and the georgic are much more about exercising a set of tropes and motifs. And they are also, right, about natures that has been subject to human intervention. This is a far cry from empirical realism. What I shall argue is that Shakespeare accepts and even revels in the limitations of Early Modern nature writing. In making this claim I draw upon Ken Hiltners' relatively recent argument the pastoral is a gestural environmental genre rather than a mimetic one. So, it doesn't represent the environment as it is but it draws attention to the environment — and Hiltner argues even environmental problems in the Early Modern period. Shakespeare explores the pastoral mode in a number of his plays. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, for example Titania accuses Oberon of wooing a shepherdess, named Philida, in the shape of Corin. And both of the shepherd's names are taken from Virgil's epilogues. And the pastoral, of course, also supplies the back drop for Shakespeare's As You Like It, and much of The Winter's Tale. Shakespeare also evokes the georgic mode — though I'd say in a less systematic way — in a number of his history plays. Toward the end of Henry V the Duke of Burgundy — a largely neutral party in the war between Britain and France — uses the georgic rhetorically to bring about the figurative reconciliation between warring nations. And he says, "Alas" — he's talking about peace — "she hath been from France too long been chased and all her husbandry doth lie in heaps. Corrupting in its own fertility." Essentially, what peace will mean is proper husbandry of the land. The restoration of productive landscape. The georgic is for Burgundy an ideological strategy for brokering peace. Glossing over the violence inherent in cultural and political dominion and, I think, were supposed to recognize it as such. Shakespeare's plays evoke vivid landscapes but they also call attention to the conventions of environmental representation. I think a paradigmatic example is in King Lear when Edgar, disguised as the beggar Poor Tom, leads his father to the Cliffs of Dover, where he will commit suicide. Edgar describes the cliffs in language so evocative that it practically produces the vertigo that it describes. And this is Edgar’s famous speech to his blind father, "Father come
on, sir; here's the place: stand still. How fearful and dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low! The crows and choughs that wing the midway air Show scarce so gross as beetles: half way down Hangs one that gathers sapphire dreadful trade! Methinks he seems no bigger than his head: The fishermen, that walk upon the beach, Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark, Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge, That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes, Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more; Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight Topple down headlong." And I have here, right, the speech and a, kind of, beautiful picture of the Dover Cliffs that he is supposedly describing. But, so, right, Edgar's description conjures the Dover Cliff landscape, including its human economy and non-human denizens. Using shifts of perspectives the fisherman appear like mice, the birds like tiny beetles. But, of course, Edgar is not describing the Dover Cliffs at all. He is conjuring the landscape out of thin air in order to convince his blind father of its existence. When Gloucester finally cast himself off of the cliff, or so he believes, Edgar convinces him that he was saved by a miracle. Like the blind Gloucester, Shakespeare's audience and readers are momentarily tricked into perceiving something that isn't there. And, right, every time I read this I'm always thinking, "Oh they're at the Dover Cliffs". But that's not — right, there is no Dover Cliff scene, really in King Lear. We are momentarily tricked into perceiving something that isn't there and landscapes are reduced to tricks of language. And yet, I would argue that Shakespeare is also interested in gesturing toward the actual physical world by exposing the extend to which the tropes of Early Modern writing failed to capture nature's actual physical conditions. In As You Like It, the exiled Duke Senior is forced to live with his court in the Forest of Arden, while his brother, Duke Frederick, rules in his stead. It is a political exile rather than a pastoral retreat. And yet Duke Senior evokes the pastoral in order to render pleasant his perilous situation. And this is one of his famous speeches. "Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile, Hath not old custom made this life more sweet Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods More free from peril than the envious court? Here feel we not the penalty of Adam, The seasons' difference, as the icy fang And churlish chiding of the winter's wind, Which, when it bites and blows upon my body, Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say, "This is no flattery. These are counselors That feelingly persuade me what I am." Sweet are the uses of adversity, Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, Wears yet a precious jewel in his head." This is a folk belief, by the way. "And this our life, exempt from public haunt, Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything. I would not change it." While, Duke Senior initially employs the natural convention of a life of ease and harmony, arguing for a life more sweet out in the woods, he quickly reverses this assessment; presumably in the face of immediate environmental forces. Facing the irreducible reality of cold weather, Duke Senior slightly changes his tone, saying "as the icy fang and churlish tiding of the winter's wind, which when it blows, bites upon my body. Even 'til I shrink
with cold." Rather than arguing against the existence of uncomfortably cold weather, Duke Senior, now attempts to transform his harsh physical conditions into an advantage by employing another common poetic pastoral convention the contrast between town and country — or in this case court and country. Now the cold, which is viscerally rendered in the evocative phrase "icy fang" — and I grew up in Upper Michigan by the way, so this brings back scraping my car whenever I had to go anywhere. Still, pretty cold in Idaho but not quite that cold. And I think the strong alliteration of the line, "the churling chiding of the winter's wind", is acknowledged and transformed into a boon. The harsh environment does not flatter him as the people in the court did, but always tells the truth. Steven Greenblatt argues that this kind of improvisation is central to Shakespeare's art. Shakespeare produces characters who seem pliable, capable of adapting to any given situation — and I would argue any given environment. In Duke Senior's case, nature's failure to conform to his initial trope's parameters lead to a more fitting evaluation. He must accommodate nature's ability to interrupt human conventions. Shakespeare's pastoral is, thus, what Harry Berger Jr. calls the strong pastoral; pastoral that is self-aware enough to call attention to the pastoral mode. I think another way of thinking about this would be meta-pastoral, its pastoral that knows about pastoral and knows that it's not real. But I think more specifically, Shakespeare's strong pastoral gestures towards those environmental forces that cannot conform to literary convention. Nature's indifference to human affairs and conventions. This speech, by the way, contrasts with Orlando's earlier complaint to a character — actually a character named Adam — of being kept rusticated in a place that is like the stalling of an ox. Orlando's proximity to nature produces bitterness and resentment rather than pastoral harmony. Okay, for the final part of my talk I would like to return to the proto-ecological dimensions of Early Modern economy, which I argue Shakespeare employs in his later career tragedies King Lear and Timon of Athens. In both plays the initiating conditions behinds tragedy involves acts of bad household management — for Lear, splitting up and giving away his kingdom to bad daughters Goneril and Regan, entails also giving away his means of supporting himself and his lifestyle. Arguments between Lear and his daughters involve his inability to manage his train of knights, which is his household. Ultimately, Goneril and Regan lock their elderly father out-of-doors where he is forced to contend with the elements. And this is — the dialogue I have on the overhead. "Hear me my lord," says Goneril, "What need you five and twenty, ten, or five To follow in a house where twice so many Have a command to tend you?" And they're talking about knights here. Regan: "What need one?" O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars Are in the poorest thing superfluous. Allow not nature more than nature needs, Man's life's as cheap as beast's." Lear's experiment to minimal economy becomes an experiment in human suffering. Unaccommodated man, it turns out, is worse off than non-human creatures. Indeed, King Lear provides the paradigmatic example of Laurie Shanning calls negative exceptionalism, the idea
that human kind is unique in the natural world but for all the wrong reasons. Leer finds in the
natural world, not the economy of nature, but human misery and objection. It is Shakespeare's
Timon of Athens, a play inferior to King Lear by virtually all measures, that most fully
explores, though, — though I would argue, ultimately rejects the possibility of human economy
rooted in nature. Timon of Athens is a of course a relatively obscure play by Shakespearean
standards, but it recently gained new life for its portrayal of economic ruin. In a relatively
recent review of Nicholas Hytner's modern-dress production of the play at London's National
Theatre John Lahr writes, "Timon's tale of collapse catches not only the fragility of the British
economy, but the unnerving immanence of the collapse of its ruling élite." It seems that
Shakespeare's pointed satire of the excesses of the Jacobean court resonate in a time when
burgeoning debt and unemployment threaten the global financial system. And although I wrote
this a bit earlier — things are looking a bit sunnier now, perhaps. In this context Timon's suicide
at the end of the play, eerily resonates with a rash of, so called, economic suicides prevalent in
places hard hit by recession. It is this particularly bleak play — If this particularly bleak play
speaks to us anew about economic crisis, I would argue it also has something to do with the
impending ecological disaster of the 21st century. Timon's financial ruin is accompanied by an
abandonment of civilization in favor of a life of simplicity, misanthropy, and self-deprivation.
A, kind of, negative Thoreau-vian retreat into the wilderness, if you will. Although this shift
lacks the benevolent self-realization and communion with nature usually associated with the
wilderness retreat, it does point to an alternative topography located outside the walls of Athens
in which other economic structures might flourish. My central claim is that in criticizing the
unnatural monetary economy that leads to Timon's downfall, Shakespeare posits another,
largely unrealized, economic possibility; the idea of a natural economy. Timon himself dies an
obscure death in the wilderness, however. Still, by highlighting the perverse disjunction
between wealth and biological process of life Shakespeare gestures toward the possibility of a
more sustainable relationship between the economic and the ecological, in which the two might
reinforce than undermine each other. The economy of Timon of Athens is generally understood
as bifurcated into the gifted economy that Timon imagines and the monetary economy that
actually structures Athenian life. And the tragedy, for those of you who haven't read it, — and
I guess I should presume, unlike some other plays, that fewer people have read or seen this
play — is initiated by Timon who is this incredibly generous guy, giving away all of his wealth
to people who he believes to be his friends. And he believes that there is a kind of reciprocity
in this, that he's making these friends and the friends then, later, will come to his aid if he needs
them. We later found out, however, that Timon is borrowing all this money and eventually the
bubble collapses and Timon is left with nothing and no one comes to his aid at all. And he's
left simply to rail against humanity. I'm going to skip down a little bit, because I don't want to
take too much time. Timon of Athens, by the way, first published in the folio. And I wanted to
talk about one passage that I think, kind of, best illustrates Timon's evocation of natural economy. So in the wilderness he rails against humanity but I think he briefly, kind of, comes to an idea that of a possibility of a life that might be better, that might be more ethical, that might be more sustainable. And, by the way, the ironic moment in the play is that Timon — and his engraving from the 19th century nicely illustrates this — that Timon is digging in the earth looking for roots — the, kind of, most basic things that he could possibly find to sustain him, the most basic of food sources — right, the root, actually — the root of economy, I would argue. And he ironically finds buried gold, and he uses it to punish those around him he's pays prostitutes to spread venereal disease, he pays, and he pays Alcibiades to go and sack Athens. It's this heavily ironic moment. We do possibly get — we get maybe the possibility of something nicer though in this passage. He runs into — but it's only — it's very brief — he runs into some bandits and he's speaking to them. "Your greatest want is, you want much of meat. Why should you want? Behold, the earth hath roots; Within this mile break forth a hundred springs; The oaks bear mast, the briers scarlet hips; The bounteous housewife, nature, on each bush Lays her full mess before you. What? Why want? We cannot live on grass, on berries, water, As beasts and birds and fishes. Nor on the beasts themselves, the birds, and fishes; You must eat men." Figuring his new environment as the bounteous housewife nature, Timon re-imagines the natural world as an abundant and properly managed estate, though which human kind might restructure its life according to biological necessity. The final line in this passage — you must eat men — however, signals to the fact that in the world of the play humanity is too far invested in perverse and cannibalistic economic structures to realize the more benevolent alternative of living off the land. Indeed, the cannibalistic image presented in this line serves to highlight the entropic structure — I use, kind of, entropy to think about how this play works, it just loses energy and builds in chaos — and underscores its pessimistic vision of the state of nature removed from any possibility of sustainable economics. Likewise, the gendered metaphors of these lines serve to highlight the dearth of women in the play and, consequently, the possibility of a comedic or tragi-comic ending based on marriage and the formation of a new household. Rather than presenting a sustained and viable alternative, I argue that these lines illuminate a counter-discourse, that of natural economy, a possible — though largely unrealized model — for dwelling in the world. But, of course, Timon's life in the wild itself proves unsustainable and he dies an obscure death, offstage. As Steve Mence puts it, "this natural world is a fully organized system that does not need divine control, but its destructive ecology leaves no room for man." My sense, is that Shakespeare employs natural economy in Timon of Athens as he does the pastoral in As You Like It. Countless other examples, ironically as yet another trope for giving shape to, but ultimately failing to grasp a largely indifferent natural world. Like the rainy weather that would have routinely disrupted performances in Shakespeare's open air theatre, the natural world exists in Shakespeare's plays as a force that
tends to resist or even subvert the trope's characters used to conceptualize and control it. And
I'll stop here and thank you very much for coming. So hopefully we have some time for talk
and for questions.

(applause)

And thanks again for coming. I was really afraid when I saw the schedules at 7:00 on Friday
night. But this is actually a nice turn out I think. So I'm happy to talk, questions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1
You were reading from a text. Was that your PMLA?

DR. REMIEN
A bit. This is a hodge podge. Bits of it early on. My PMLA article really tries to outline the,
kind of, ecological — it's called its forthcoming I don't have the date yet — I've just signed the
papers which I was excited to do — but it's called Economy and Ecology in Early Modern
England. And I, kind of, I broadly outline my work on Digby and how this provides an
alternative way of thinking about ecology in the Early Modern period. And really, for non-
specialists, you can think, "okay, so what?" The way that I'm intervening in the criticism it that
people for a long time now have been talking about ecology — a book exists like Shakespeare
and ecology — and people have been talking about this for a long time. But, of course, right,
ecology doesn't exist for Shakespeare. Why employ this modern paradigm when we can
actually go back to an Early Modern concept that Shakespeare was aware of and try to unpack
his own understanding of the natural world.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2
Hi. Well I might have a couple of questions but the first one is that — it just struck me during
your talk that we always refer to Shakespeare and the pastoral when were actually talking about
Shakespeare in the wilderness. And they're two very different things. So why do they, then,
conflate it?

DR. REMIEN
Yeah, I think that's a good question. I mean it might be because our culture is so invested —
our culture is — I think America broadly is so invested in ideas of wilderness. There's this
great text on kind of, — it's really American Environmentalism but, kind of, just the American
ethos called Wilderness and the American Mind by a guy named Rodrick Nash. Yeah. So I
think we always, kind of, import these ideas. And, right, Shakespeare's wilderness is never the
wilderness. It's always this, right — I think Midsummer Night's Dream is a play, kind of,
seemed like — it can seem like the characters, the lovers and the actors are going off into the
wild. But, right, they're going off into what's defined as this, kind of, pastoral setting. Even if
it, kind of, becomes — it, kind of, moves — spins out of control.
AUDIENCE MEMBER 2
Right. Which that leads to my second question, which is why aren't we talking about gardens? Because that seems like the third space, right?

DR. REMIEN
I think that's a really good question. Yeah, I think some good work has been done on gardens. One of the examples that I didn't bring up here — it's one of my favorites of Shakespeare, kind of, not taking a trope at face value, is in Henry VI Part II — so the rebel Jack Cade leads a popular rebellion and wreaks havoc all over England. But he runs off and essentially into the countryside, and it turns out the countryside doesn't provide for him at all, cause he's just starving. And what eventually gets Jack Cade caught is he breaks into someone's garden and the guy's name is Iden, so it's the garden of Iden, and Iden is uttering this, kind of, stock — what I would argue is, kind of, georgic discourse — kind of like what Duke Senior is saying. Like how living in the country is so much better than living in the city.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2
Iden's a rube, yeah.

DR. REMIEN
So he's uttering this and then he meets Jack Cade — so one of the tropes of good economy would be good hospitality — so instead of being hospitable he, right, its Jack Cade, so he's going to — he's going to get it. But he quickly does battles and with and decapitates his guest. He's also quick to present the head of Jack Cade to the rulers in hope of some kind of reward and, presumably, maybe, a place at court. He uses this, then, to exit the georgic life that he claims to care so much about. Yeah, I think some people are working through gardens. Gardens are so heavily, kind of, they're so heavily weighed down by the biblical narrative, right? It's just, it's always part of this discourse that — I mean it's not — I'm thinking of about this, kind of, broadly and I would say, like, gardening discourse sometimes becomes part of the pastoral, in a way — or part of the georgic, in a way. It's a good question, I think something worth exploring. Gardens in Shakespeare. There's one study that exists but it's not coming to mind right now. Other questions?

DR. HANSEN
I wonder if one of the other moments, kind of, of mediating that is the, the, kind of, debate about art and nature in The Winter's Tale, right. So they're talking about flowers and, in particular, a young woman who's grown up — she's actually a princess, but she's grown up in the natural world — believing that she's a shepherd's daughter and she is adamantly against what she describes as 'streak'd gillyvors'. So these, you know, multicolored carnations, because as she describes them they are natures bastards. I mean genetically modified organism and she is having nothing to do with it, right? And so there is something of husbandry and, at least,
there it’s couched as, you know, kind of, art and nature in conflict.

DR. REMIEN
Yeah, and well but she's — yeah you're right — I mean she is, kind of, herself the product of — she's the best of nature and culture combined. I'm thinking — and I'm, kind of, deflecting because I haven't been to The Winter's Tale a lot. I'm teaching it this semester. Give you a better account, but. I'm thinking of Cymbeline in the princes who are raised out in the wilderness. And they still have their, like, innate princely-ness, which somehow carries the best of culture but it somehow then, their living without cultures corrupting influence. Which makes a character like Cloten into this, like, this really obnoxious character.

DR. HANSEN
Shakespeare seems to be very interested in that. Because arguably, Miranda in The Tempest is another manifestation of that. She's inherently a princess, even though she's grown up outside of court. As soon as Ferdinand who's direct from the court and a royal wedding, sees her she's a goddess. She's the god of nature, in fact. And, you know, thing divine.

DR. REMIEN
Yeah, I'm thinking of what she says to Caliban. So she's educated in this really, kind of, limited sense in this hermetically sealed island. And Caliban's like the counter-model — I'm just kind of thinking through this now, I don't really but, right, but — she's — because she has the innate goodness she can presumably, like at first, right. Caliban — or so if we can believe the back stories, is, kind of, raised alongside Miranda but the print of goodness would not take, right. His education, because there's something, kind of, inherent in him that wouldn't turn out the same way. And he turns out to be, right, rotten. He tries to rape her and then we know him as the monster in the play. Yeah, it's a good question, like, could we raise it? It gets me, kind of, interested. It's not something I've really worked on. Truth be told, I work much more in the 17th century but I absolutely love taking Shakespeare and teaching it. I teach Shakespeare all the time. I'm thinking of, like, wild child rearing in Shakespeare. Somehow that might be some kind of interesting — like, how, — but it has to be the right kind of person. I'm thinking of As You Like It as well, right. You have some fake shepherds and then you have some shepherds who are like straight out of the pastoral and they really speak, kind of, beautiful verse. And then you have the country bumpkin shepherds who speak in this rambling prose. So somehow you get, right, so somehow this distinction of is made even within the — even though, right — the pastoral would seems to have a, kind of, leveling effect, right. This is all country laborers and they're all somehow the same. But they're not in Shakespeare.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3
The further you get from the city.
So somehow the city is, maybe, better?

The interaction between — you go to the city a lot and there's versus maybe once a year. And, you know.

I'm thinking of, like, even — I'm mean maybe this is a far stretch but we still have this idea of, like, the people who go on Thoreau-vian retreats and get all their gear and things like that. And then it this, kind of, wonderful experience. But often, right, like, people who have never been in the city are viewed in a different way. There's a, kind of, judgment of the rural though a desire for the rural at the same time.

And there's a deep wish for civilized behavior to be somehow inherent, somehow in the special ones, right. That we can say that that could actually be natural. So the problem with Caliban is just that he's still, kind of, and animal. Right? It's not that he's bad. It's just that he's not human. And so the differentiation between the pastoral characters is that there's a range from, like, inherently, like civilized to prove that, like, some humans are naturally civilized. So civilization can be natural. It's not always this, sort of, imposed kind of behavior.

It’s always the upper-classes, too, right.

They're the ones going to the play.

But the fantasy of the aristocratic world view. That it somehow, no matter what — it's not that I was raised in this estate. It's that I am who I am and these traits would have manifest themselves no matter what. Yeah, this is really the first time I'm thinking about this. All the differentiation between characters who are in some ways ostensibly the same. It’s really interesting. Yeah.

I'm curious if you knew what was going on with the usury or borrowing or lending in Shakespeare's time — the 1600's — because there's a lot of references. You know, neither a borrower or lender be.

Yeah, Merchant of Venice, of course.
AUDIENCE MEMBER 4

And, of course, Timon.

DR. REMIEN

Timon is really a play that's largely — I think Shakespeare had Aristotle's politics in mind, which is the text that most clearly lays out this differentiation between economy — and that's the — which the translator renders natural acquisition — even modern translators call it this in chrematistics — and usury is the quintessential example of chrematistics. Its unnatural Aristotle say, because its currency son of currency. It's like a perversion of the biological. But, of course, right, Shakespeare that's the problem. Like, in Merchant of Venice, right, everybody's partaking in the system. Right? It's not — Shylock becomes the scapegoat for it but it's not as though its Shylock's system. He's just part of this larger system that's an absolutely necessary part of the economy. Yeah, when I think Timon would be trying to get at something — but, right, yeah, the beginning of Timon of Athens is, right, its — well actually he's not. He's not investing — he's just borrowing, and borrowing. So, and borrowing and interest and everything goes away, right. All of a sudden everything's gone. I had a student one time ask where did Timon get his wealth. And you know, they never say. But it is actually an interesting point. What is the source of wealth? And I think, right, the roots. I mean really is trying to go and get something that's more natural. Unlike usury, which to Aristotle currency son of currency. Chrematistics, unnatural acquisition. So I think in Timon of Athens its — those are the polarities. Usury is the exact opposite of the economy that I'm talking about. And these are ideals that are never born out and I think Shakespeare's aware of that. And I think Ben Johnson — Ben Johnson's the one who I really credit with, kind of, articulating the ideal. And he invents this genre of the 17th century country house poem. It's not the chronologically the first example. But the most influential example is this poem called To Penhurst and it's about this estate that functions where the natural world is, kind of, self-sacrificing but its abundant but it's also sustainable somehow. You never run out of things. But I think Johnson doesn't quite — never quite takes that view seriously either. Yeah, that's a good question. Because that is really important to Shakespeare. I don't think I've done quite enough with Merchant of Venice. This project, by they way is just about to the publisher, so I'm shutting down rather than opening up. But, I'm really interested in further projects, further ways of exploring these ideas.

DR. HANSEN

My other question is an extreme one, too. Because it got me thinking, cause Shylock's defense ultimately devolves to a form of naturalism, right? He has this bizarre digression about Joseph and Laban's sheep. He describes his money, you know — why are you — he's says why, why are you talking about are your ducats, you know, sheep? And he says, "I don't know I make them breed as fast." So he sees it as what he's doing as absolutely natural not least because of
the box that he's been forced into as Jew in Venice and this is the only livelihood that he has. Or so he claims.

**DR. REMIEN**

Isn't that like root — like the word impecunious isn't that doesn't that come from sheep ultimately? No, no, I think there's that etymology, I'll have to play with the Oxford English Dictionary, and it's my favorite toy. I mean, I, you know. It's like one of the hazards of when you're studying something; you see it everywhere. And if you see it everywhere if something's everywhere, it's not quite useful enough. Because it's not — But I really am, I really do think that economy is the — it's the flip side of usury and its, kind of, I'm seeing it everywhere in Early Modern culture. It's this ideal but it's an ideal that's going away. Actually it's a residual ideal. One of the most famous histories of the Early Modern period is called The Crisis of the Aristocracy. It's about this group in decline. Who nevertheless still has so much social capital. But suddenly, right, you have these people making a lot of money who aren't part of this traditional class. And I think in many ways economy, as its articulated by Shakespeare's contemporaries is this nostalgia for manorialism, this, kind of, manorial economy based on the estates — this, kind of, organic economy. I actually see — there are a couple historians who — Carolyn Merchant kind of view. She's an environmental historian, who I think romanticizes it a bit too much. But economy, I think, probably the residual ideal and then what more people are talking about with Early Modern economics is that the emergence of capitalism or proto-capitalism or whatever we call it exactly in that period. I think that economy would be the flipside to that. It would be the residual. And it's the ideal, I think, that people cling to even as its going away. Or perhaps more as it's going away. Part of my argument about Digby he explores this idea of the economy of nature precisely at the time when all of the — many of the aristocrats in the civil war are having their estate seized. He had his estate seized and he never got it back. He was stripped of his property — manorialism becomes a principle of nature, not of human society. That's actually a good iteration of the comment earlier of somehow nature always finds its way. Other questions, comments?

**DR. HANSEN**

I think it only remains for us to once more collectively say our thanks.

*(applause)*

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]