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## CRITICISM

### Strange weather in *King Lear*

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This article argues that *King Lear* can help re-shape the emerging discourse of eco-criticism. The play's focus on human dis-harmony with the non-human environment resonates with recent developments in ecological science like the "post-equilibrium shift". Shakespeare's representations of dis-equilibrium in the storm scenes can correct eco-criticism's reliance on pastoral and Romantic visions of harmony. The play's emphasis on the way natural systems, especially the weather, disrupt humanity's meaning-making capacities generates an alternative to dualistic notions of the self–nature relationship. By representing ecological instability and pluralized selfhood, *King Lear* reminds "green" readers how difficult and disorderly living in a mutable eco-system can be.

**Keywords:** *King Lear*; eco-criticism; Shakespeare; ecology; post-equilibrium shift

I reverently believe that the maker who makes us all makes everything in New England but the weather. I don't know who makes that . . . The weather is always doing something there; always attending strictly to business; always getting up new designs and trying them on people to see how they will go. . . In the spring I have counted one hundred and thirty-six different kinds of weather inside four-and-twenty hours. (Mark Twain 1109–10)<sup>1</sup>

Twain's joke outlines two ways to understand the weather: appeals to supernatural control (divine or not) and a process of logical enumeration.<sup>2</sup> These responses reflect two familiar paradigms in Western culture: religion and science.<sup>3</sup> Twain emphasizes the multiplicity lurking beneath both hermeneutic frames, in which 136 different variations make all weathers incomprehensible. Meteorological plurality mocks human faith in an orderly universe. Re-thinking *King Lear* alongside Twain's invocation of disorderly weather suggests that a fundamental task of literary narratives is representing how human bodies interact with the natural world. For both Twain and Shakespeare, the weather's story – the weather's impact on the story – unsettles existing conceptual frames.<sup>4</sup> Twain's joke emphasizes that natural disorder poses a basic problem for narrative order.<sup>5</sup> The storm scenes in *King Lear*, Shakespeare's most intense portrayal of disordered nature, represent natural chaos in ways that strikingly anticipate recent ideas in ecological thinking and what is called the "new ecology" or the "post-equilibrium shift".<sup>6</sup> New ecologists see constant change and instability as fundamental to natural systems, and Shakespeare's play represents the human consequences of living in this incessantly mutable world.

My focus on *King Lear*'s representations of the strained relationship between human bodies and the non-human environment aims to critique some current trends

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in literary eco-criticism. The play's vision of human disharmony with the surrounding world of nature sharply rebuts the pastoral and Romantic ideas that still subtend much eco-critical thought in the humanities. Shakespeare's portrayal of disequilibrium leaps over pastoral homeostasis to anticipate the new ecology's insight that fantasies about harmony and stability do not adequately represent natural systems. As ecologist Daniel Botkin has observed about what he finds in his field work, "[w]herever we seek to find constancy we discover change" (62).<sup>7</sup> Post-equilibrium ecological models de-centre humanity's place in nature and emphasize complexity and variability in all natural systems.<sup>8</sup> *King Lear*'s representation of how disharmonious nature disrupts human meaning-making systems makes a parallel critique of early modern understandings of the humanity–nature relationship. The disruptions in Shakespeare's play are already legible to Renaissance scholars as the Ovidian legacy of mutability and flux, but early modern representations of the self–nature relationship can help modern critics to re-balance what Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garret Sullivan have described as our tendency to "think through this dynamic flux dualistically, relying on fundamental distinctions between body and environment" (3).<sup>9</sup> Works like *King Lear* can help transform sterile dualisms and static ecosystems into pluralized and dynamic conceptions of self and nature. Making sense of these competing frames requires shifting from a pastoral vision, in which nature resembles a pasture or garden, to a meteorological one, in which nature changes constantly and challenges the body at its boundaries.

From Aristotle's *Meteorologica* to the "vulgar Baconians" who published weather observations for the Royal Society in the seventeenth century, western writers have always understood the weather to be both partially predictable and radically unstable.<sup>10</sup> Aristotle's model, which dominated early modern meteorology, explained all weathers through the interactions of two kinds of evaporation, one windy and light, the other moist and heavy.<sup>11</sup> This model creates both stability and mutability; as Aristotle explains, "The sun both hinders and encourages the rise of winds" (361.b.15). The formula sounds orderly, but it does not specify when (or why) to expect high or low winds. For Aristotle, and consequently for most early modern meteorologists, winds dominate the weather and represent the basic mutability of the natural world.<sup>12</sup> Wind defines itself through change; in Shigehisa Kuriyama's phrase, "The history of wind and the body is the history of the relationship between change and human being" (242). Andrew Ross's recent claim that "[c]hanges in the weather from day to day are our most palpable contact with the phenomenon of change" (233–34) captures the tangible instability of the weather–self relationship. Ross reminds us that what we seek (and often do not find) in the predictive control of modern meteorology is fulfilment of our deep longing for an ecology of stasis. Both our experience of the weather and Shakespeare's dramatization of it suggest that this stasis is illusory.

The storm scenes in *King Lear* represent what I shall call (borrowing Ross's term) "strange weather": neither receptive to nor reflective of human desires, this version of the elements re-draws the boundaries between self and world and puts the body–nature relationship in crisis. Early modern notions like the micro-macrocosmic reciprocity between the body's humours and the world's weather become opaque.<sup>13</sup> In other plays, Shakespeare often employs allegorical structures in which the weather comprises a dynamic but stable system. The weather's most common modifiers appear early in *Macbeth*: "fair" and "foul" (1.1.11).<sup>14</sup> Fair weather, such as the

“calm seas, auspicious gales” (5.1.315) at the end of *The Tempest*, solidifies social renewal, whereas foul weather, including winter in *As You Like It*, assails mortal bodies. Sometimes the weather is hard to read, as with the clouds that “cannot hold this visible shape” (4.14.14) in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but in general the system remains legible. Shakespeare’s dramatic weather extends Tudor England’s tradition of “weather plays”, which include John Rastell’s proto-scientific *Interlude of the iiiii Elements* (1511?), John Heywood’s *Play of the Weather* (1533) and Thomas Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (1592).<sup>15</sup> Against this allegorical backdrop, *King Lear* casts in doubt the productive value of seeing humanity in nature. This play’s vision of nature can help us challenge current tendencies in eco-critical reading.

Eco-criticism’s arrival in early modern studies has been building in recent years. As Robert N. Watson, Sylvia Bowerbank, Gabriel Egan, Ken Hiltner, Diane McColley, Karen Raber, Sharon O’Dair and others have argued, the early modern period saw developments in human ideas about nature that would eventually underwrite modern ecology.<sup>16</sup> *King Lear*’s storm scenes, however, disrupt emerging paradigms of eco-criticism that have been elaborated through readings of *As You Like It* and *Paradise Lost*.<sup>17</sup> Eco-critics usually explore literature through frameworks like Jonathan Bate’s “eco-poetics”, Lawrence Buell’s “aesthetics of relinquishment”, and John Elder’s “imaginative reintegration”.<sup>18</sup> These metaphors, and their analogues in green politics, generally imagine the human–nature relationship as at least potentially stable.<sup>19</sup> Following what Barry Commoner calls the First Law of Ecology – “Everything is connected to everything else” – eco-criticism often treats literature as containing the seeds of ecological insights.<sup>20</sup> But these visions of stasis – these versions of pastoral – obscure a repeated pattern in nature in which stability dissolves into disorder. Narratives of rupture like *King Lear* contradict a current in eco-criticism in which the formal unity of a literary structure (often a lyric poem) represents an idealized natural order.<sup>21</sup> Looked at over time and through narratives of disaster, the natural world periodically disrupts systems of order.<sup>22</sup> *Lear*’s storm emphasizes that the story of human bodies in the world is not only harmony (even retrospective harmony) but violation and failure.<sup>23</sup> Juxtaposing the desire of the self to maintain its identity against the natural world’s stubborn exteriority, refusal to be incorporated, and dynamic re-inscription and violation of bodily boundaries, *King Lear* suggests that all systems of natural order – from pastoral utopianism to homeostatic constancy – can and will become unstable. Inside this storm-filled world, the play offers clarity of vision in place of sustainable hope.

Early modern visions of nature emerged from pastoralism and from what Keith Thomas calls the “theological foundations” of early modern anthropocentrism, but this broad Providentialism says little to *Lear*’s experience in the storm.<sup>24</sup> The storm scenes in *King Lear* instead provide Shakespeare’s most direct interrogation of how a Providential storm feels against your skin.<sup>25</sup> Providentialism can easily rationalize the sinking of the Spanish Armada (or the Turkish fleet in *Othello*), but has trouble with less clearly fortuitous disasters.<sup>26</sup> In literary representations, the experience of violent weather leads to a suspension of Providential judgement: Marina’s comment that “This world to me is as a lasting storm” (4.1.18) isolates her during the interval between catastrophic loss and Providential recovery. She describes her weather before its strangeness has been re-organized as Providential. In storm scenes, the human body on stage – the represented body that is both physical reality and symbolic form – marks the shifting boundary between weather and world, between divine plan

and human understanding. This body becomes uncomfortable and unintelligible. The story of the body in the storm exposes the difficulties of narrative representation in ecological crisis.<sup>27</sup>

The systems of meaning that circulate around Lear's storm-tossed body include not just familiar structures such as Providentialism and empirical observation but also early modern discourses like humoral psycho-physiology, theories of the passions, and the influences of spirits that reside in air, earth, fire and water. The storm scenes doubly impose upon the king's body, subjecting him to external forces that themselves represent his own internal passions. These scenes unsettle the meanings of and boundaries between human bodies and the world. Windy suspirations present a selfhood entangled with a hostile world. Lear's final moments, in which he expires while searching for Cordelia's breath, dramatize the centrality of moving air – the Greek *pneuma*, which means both “wind” and “breath” – in the creation of a coherent yet mobile self. Expanding the familiar binary of scientific observation and supernatural control, the early modern plurality of ideas about the relationship between human bodies and the weather disrupts “two culture” dualisms.<sup>28</sup> Post-modern understandings of cognition and selfhood as “distributed” phenomena, located less within individual subjects than across a network of agents, living and not, resonate with early modern representations of a porous self, vulnerable to and constituted by interactions with its environment.<sup>29</sup> Juxtaposing early modern multiplicity with post-modern de-centring can help us re-structure the body-in-nature relationship.<sup>30</sup>

This article unfolds the central acts of *King Lear* in order to characterize its portrayal of crisis and dynamism in the relationship between humanity and nature. To explore the play's portrait of ecological disequilibrium, I focus on the storm as it strikes the king's body. Lear's responses to violent weather unfold a story about disparate conceptual tools, including supernatural control and empirical enquiry, that finally cannot control mutable weather. Like a new ecologist, Lear learns to distrust old ideas about natural order. In presenting this crisis of legibility, Shakespeare's play gestures toward a re-configured, less sympathetic but perhaps still survivable, relationship between bodies and nature.

### “To the skin”: Storm as New Ecology

As the cold, wet king stands poised at the hovel door, he debates his inner and outer storms in language that captures the human experience of the post-equilibrium ecology. Whatever higher order the storm may (or may not) follow, Lear's body cannot understand it. In describing the physical storm, however, he pinpoints the crisis of meaning it generates. The storm, he says, “Invades us to the skin” (3.4.7). The language exposes the raw threat of strange weather, which directly touches the bare body. The phrase also shows why paradigms like Providentialism, ecological science, and humoral physiology, which each describe in different ways harmonious, or at least legible, relationships between humanity and nature, cannot defuse this threat. The storm penetrates exactly up to the line of separation between body and nature, invading precisely “to the skin”, neither more nor less. This weather is something you cannot ignore (because it is not only external) and cannot incorporate (because it is not internal either). Recalling but also recasting early modern ideas about the porousness of the body, Lear imagines his skin as a receptive barrier. This

image counters the flowing variety of the allegorical bodies that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The actor's body on stage, unlike the mutable bodies of narrative poetry, frames the self in conflict with both external and internal weather.<sup>31</sup> Instead of spanning the humanity–world boundary, the storm re-confines the self inside the body. Lear's "to the skin", like his later description of Edgar as a "poor, bare, forked animal" (3.4.108), isolates the body's vulnerability in a disorderly nature. His skin fixes him inside the storm.

This isolation of the body underlines the play's fascination with fissures in the self-world relationship and marks its challenge to eco-critical thinking. *King Lear* is obsessed with nature: the word appears 32 times in the play, a third again as many as in any other play of Shakespeare's.<sup>32</sup> The human experience of the natural world creates cold, wetness, and a need for shelter, as well as a dramatic estrangement that gets expressed in the King's madness and the temporary halt of the plot during the storm. These scenes make an instructive partial match with eco-critic Lawrence Buell's influential 1995 definition of an "environmentally oriented work". Buell's environmental literary works share four features: (1) "The nonhuman environment... suggest[s] that human history is implicated in natural history"; (2) "The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest"; (3) "Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation"; and (4) "Some sense of the environment as process... is at least implicit in the text".<sup>33</sup> Both Features 1 and 4 seem central to Shakespeare's play: the storm "implicates" human history in nature, and its "process" defines the play's action and moral impact. (Buell's later term, "environmental entanglement, [*Environmental Criticism* 23] describes the situation fairly well.) They play's concern with land demonstrates that Feature 2, the non-exclusive nature of the "human interest", is also present, but Shakespeare's drama displaces the human ethical responsibility for nature on which Buell's Feature 3 insists. The play does not exactly present humanity as "accountable" to the environment; instead the storm scenes reinforce humanity's separation from the nonhuman world. Having broken his family, Lear asks for apocalypse, but what the storm gives him, finally, is what his youngest daughter offered him at the start of the play: nothing. Perhaps, in human terms, that is all nature says to us. The weather touches but does not speak.

The storm scenes literalize the play's crisis of authority: all order-making systems – the king's body, the church's dominion, Aristotelian science, pagan superstition and empirical observation – fail. In new ecological terms, the controlling metaphor shifts from stability to disequilibrium. An anonymous Gentleman opens act 3 by establishing the basic conflict between king and weather when he describes Lear "[c]ontending with the fretful elements" (3.1.4). Lear's commands to the storm – "Blow, winds, crack your cheeks! rage, blow!" (3.2.1) – mock the temporal authority he has given up. Winds, for Aristotle, represent the driving force of weather's mutability. They are less symptoms of the weather than its cause: winds even cause earthquakes (366.a.4). When Lear commands the winds he thus attempts to govern change itself. (To quote Kuriyama again, in classical culture, "Winds foreshadowed change, exemplified change, caused change, *were* change" 239.) Rather than responding to human commands, these nonhuman forces break bodies into parts: the wind "tears [Lear's] white hair,/Which the impetuous blasts with eyeless rage/Catch in their fury, and make nothing of" (3.1.7–9). Wind makes "nothing" in two senses: it turns semi-living

matter (Lear's hair) into dead things, and it transforms a once-orderly nature into chaos.

Ecologists of dis-equilibrium emphasize that the fundamental human desire for order colours our representations of natural homeostasis, but the storm scenes in *King Lear* subject all principles of stability to rigorous critique.<sup>34</sup> The "little world of man" (3.1.10) is not merely divided like Lear's kingdom, but assailed by the "great gods/That keep this dreadful pudder over our heads" (3.2.49–50).<sup>35</sup> The role of God or the gods has been much discussed in *King Lear* criticism, and the play's nominally pagan setting may have cushioned the storm's apocalyptic impact for some members of Shakespeare's audience, but this line emphasizes how unclearly supernatural forces communicate with humans.<sup>36</sup> The gods make "pudder", not revelation. The play's bleak vision of nature has led critics from Maynard Mack (52) to Robert N. Watson to term it anti-pastoral.<sup>37</sup> In this nightmare nature, it is weather, not words or moral systems, that touches human bodies. Providentialism cannot speak to the experience of the storm not just because the gods are unnamed and plural (and, the play later hints, wantonly cruel) but because the storm makes Lear's body "nothing", and nothing cannot talk. Personifying the storm may be, as Egan argues, a "trap [for] the character and the playhouse audience" (139) but the play offers nothing else. Unlike Macbeth's Birnam wood or the riotous seas of *The Tempest* and *Pericles*, the storm lacks intelligible supernatural forces.

Lear himself speaks for human desires characteristic of the old ecology when he attempts to moralize the weather into a coherent and stable system. Questioning Poor Tom, he asks the basic question of Providential discourse: "What is the cause of thunder?" (3.4.155). The epic question of causation – "Tell me the cause, O Muse", sings Virgil – allows Lear to request that his "philosopher" (3.4.154) present a metaphysics of catastrophe, a "cause in nature that make these hard hearts" (3.6.77–78).<sup>38</sup> Thunder had natural causes in early meteorology – Aristotle claimed it arose from a "collision" between dry and moist exhalations (369.a.30) – but empirical structures cannot touch Lear's moral urgency. Lear's question (which Edgar avoids) has a rich history. John Danby posed it in 1948: "what relation is there between the moral world of man and its containing universe?" (184). Critical terminology has shifted since the 1940s, but this question remains at the heart of eco-criticism.<sup>39</sup> These scenes suggest that neither Providentialism nor empirical science, and neither the humours nor the pagan gods, answer it. The King cannot find himself in the weather: "I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness;/I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children" (3.2.16–17). He emphasizes separation, not continuity, and refuses kinship with his world: "You owe me no subscription" (3.2.18). He rages as much against the elements as his daughters: "But yet I call you servile ministers,/That will with two pernicious daughters join/Your high-engendr'd battles 'gainst a head/So old and white as this. O, ho! 'tis foul" (3.2.21–24). The storm is "high-engendr'd" in both physical and metaphysical senses – it comes from the sky and from heaven – but Lear disdains it no matter its origins. His final epithet, "foul", refers jointly to the weather and his family.

The king's most sustained evocation of the weather rejects two dominant forms of human order in western culture: divine power and human accounting. In Lear's poetry, these two principles appear on the tops of buildings about to be flooded: "You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout/Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!" (3.2.2–3). Church steeples and weather cocks represent two broad

discourses the culture of emerging modernity used to insulate itself from violent weather: the steeple stands for the Church and its Providentialist master-plot, and weathercocks for human technologies to measure (and perhaps predict) the wind.<sup>40</sup> But neither church nor emergent meteorological technology can constrain “thought-executing fires” and “all-shaking thunder” (3.2.4, 6). Lear’s language spans the inmost reaches of the self (thought) and the vastness of the world (all-shaking thunder). Apocalypse shatters humanist and supernatural visions of order: “Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ th’ world!/Crack nature’s mold, all germines spill at once/That makes ingrateful man!” (3.2.7–9).<sup>41</sup> From this disorder no order returns; all molds and seeds are gone.<sup>42</sup> Living in the storm – living in ecological crisis – means living without order or equilibrium.

Potential structures for sheltering Lear’s body come from his servants, the Fool and Kent. Kent, speaking for weathercocks and reason, attempts to re-naturalize the relationship between King and world by treating this storm as the exception that proves the rule. “Since I was man”, he notes, “Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,/ . . . I never/Remember to have heard. Man’s nature cannot carry/Th’ affliction nor the fear” (3.2.45–49). Kent views the storm as unnatural because it exceeds what mankind can bear both at present (in affliction) and in the future (in fear). He presents a proto-ecological reading, asserting that mankind has a sustainable place in the biosphere on every night except this one. (*Macbeth* works in precisely this way: nature’s course gets interrupted, but by the play’s end the “time is free” [5.8.55] again.) Kent’s solution is technological: he asks Lear to seek shelter inside the only remaining human habitation, the hovel. He is a human weathercock, relying on empirical observation and man-made structures.

The Fool, by contrast, follows the church’s Providentialist master-plot by suggesting that Lear await supernatural rescue. Reprising Feste’s song from *Twelfth Night* – “He that has and a little tiny wit/ . . . Must make content with his fortunes fit,/Though the rain it raineth every day” (3.2.74–77) – he summarizes the theological/philosophical solution that Lear later seeks from Poor Tom. The two retainers – Kent as proto-scientific weathercock and the Fool as the steeple of a Providential Church – get Lear inside the hovel, but this retreat seems partial at best. The king’s turn to shelter gets introduced by a startling moment of moral blindness in which Lear terms himself “a man/More sinn’d against than sinning” (3.2.59–60). His self-regard ignores the basic ecological lesson of the storm: that a man, even a king, cannot be the centre of the universe. But rather than seeing Lear as a failed Thoreauvian who cannot live in Nature, or a failed Romantic who cannot peer into what Percy Bysshe Shelley calls the “everlasting universe of things” (89), I suggest that Shakespeare’s play stages the opacity and unnarratability of the eco-sphere. Rejected by his daughters, the king flees into the “wild night” (2.4.308), but what he finds he can neither command nor comprehend.

Reading the storm scenes through their parallels with the post-equilibrium shift in ecological thinking brings out their powerful representation of natural chaos. But it also seems meaningful (as doubtless some readers will have already noted) that there is no real storm on the stage: it is all a play. Tin sheets, rattled backstage, cause this thunder. The storm scenes explore the limits of theatricality, insisting that the audience understand the actor’s body on stage as both imaginatively inside and literally apart from the hostile nature that the play’s fictional world creates.<sup>43</sup> The body on stage, like the body in the storm, functions as a boundary between raw



experience and the narratives humans create to order experience. As Robert Weimann has argued, the force of playing – as cultural practice and symbolic register – strains against poetic and linguistic meaning.

### Eco-poetics and Crisis

The storm scenes in *King Lear* dramatize the felt human experience of disequilibrium. No available systems – neither humours nor spirits, neither the religious order of Providential history nor the factual order of empirical observation, neither steeples nor cocks – can soothe the painful place where the weather touches “to the skin”. The discourse of meteorology, which from Aristotle to the Weather Channel focuses on extreme weather, constantly repeats the basic opacity of our surrounding environment. Strange weather’s re-configuration of the ecological relationship emphasizes the incompatibility of human senses (physical and moral) in relation to the natural world. As the new ecology suggests, this invocation of a non-hospitable environment is not unique to tragic drama. Pierre Hadot has recently re-read Heraclitus’s ancient phrase, “Nature loves to hide”, to unfold the long history of competing transparent and mysterious ideas of nature.<sup>44</sup> From the pre-Socratics through Heidegger and Wittgenstein, nature has been imagined alternatively as Promethean, subject to human discovery and control, or as Orphic, its essence hidden and unavailable. The cultures of science (and, to a large extent, modernity) from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries have emphasized Promethean power. But if the natural world becomes increasingly inhospitable, Orphic fictions of instability like *King Lear* may acquire new resonance.

Recognizing the Orphic and disharmonious side of nature requires supplementing ecological harmonies with starker visions of natural disorder and multiplicity. It also means retelling the story of eco-criticism. Eco-criticism derives its urgency from our current experience of global environmental crisis.<sup>45</sup> In its Romantic inflections, eco-criticism bridges theory and practice, literature and public policy, the humanities and sciences.<sup>46</sup> Ecological thinking may be a product of the Enlightenment (ecology is a nineteenth-century word), but its outlines emerge in the early modern period precisely as strains within Providentialism and unified body–world systems such as humoral physiology. The claims of God and nature were not yet rivals for most early modern thinkers; Hooker’s divine “Law in Nature” complements Bacon’s proto-empiricist natural law.<sup>47</sup> Emphasizing connections and tensions among the magic world of Providentialism, the humoral body, and the disenchanted sphere of ecology can help re-write the cultural break of modernity as a strained continuity, in which ecology inhabits a cultural space carved out from inside supernatural world views. (Even the periods’ master-narratives parallel each other, with global warming resembling a modern technological version of the Fall.) Looking at Providentialism and ecology together suggests that the long history of cultural modernity describes less the disenchanting of the world than the constant renegotiating of relationships among human experience, Providential order and empirical observation.<sup>48</sup>

Non-harmonious fictions like Lear’s storm critique eco-utopianism from Renaissance pastoral to the Gaia hypothesis. But critique is not all these stories have to offer. *King Lear*’s opaque world of catastrophe and crisis bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the place in which we are learning to live now. In our estranged and estranging world, Lear’s tortured theatre of endurance and

disillusion may come to rival or re-write older temptations to live “in” or “with” nature.<sup>49</sup> Such fictions about what nature is and what it does to our bodies may not support hopes of sustainability or interdependence, but by re-configuring how bodies interact with a world that threatens “to the skin”, literary culture can help create new perspectives. The world in ecological crisis may not resemble a pastoral garden so much as the sea in flood. If so, Michel Serres’s concluding remarks in *The Natural Contract* may anticipate a theatrics of mutability. “I live in shipwreck alert”, writes Serres. “Always in dire straits, untied, lying to, ready to founder” (124). This openness to change and catastrophe, fearing disaster but also receptive to change, is the state to which *King Lear*’s strange weather brings us. Perhaps it is where ecological crisis is taking us as well.

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### Notes

1. I first encountered this passage in Andrew Ross (235–36).
2. Jokes and proverbs about the weather’s mutability appear in all human cultures. Morris Palmer Tilley records two sixteenth-century English examples: “There is no weather ill when the wind is still” (714) and “As wavering as the Weathercock” (715).
3. S.K. Heniger observes the split between a hermeneutic posture and an empirical method in Elizabethan meteorology: “theoretical pure science based on Aristotle, and the applied pseudo science of weather prognostication carried on by the astrologers” (14–15). Vladimir Janković, writing about a slightly later period, observes the tension between an “idiom of marvel and providence” and a practice of “inductive enquiry” (33).
4. Daniel Defoe later treated the weather as marking the boundary between theology and science (or “natural philosophy”): “The Christian begins just where the Philosopher ends . . . so where God has, as it were, laid his Hand upon any Place, and Nature presents us with an universal Blank, we are therein led . . . naturally to recognize the Infinite Wisdom and Power of the God of Nature” (14, 15).
5. Janković emphasizes that early modern conceptions of the weather were above all narratives (34).
6. Ian Scoones observes that the shift from equilibrium to post-equilibrium models has firmly established itself within scientific ecology, but that this shift has not yet influenced public policy and popular environmental narratives. His call for the “simultaneous appreciation of issues of representation of landscape and nature and the material processes of environmental change” (497) suggests that humanities scholarship may be valuable in addressing this failure. See also Michael Dove.
7. Greg Gerrard names C.D. Clements and R. Brewer among other ecologists who support Botkin’s notion of disorder in ecological systems (57–59, 134, 178).
8. On complexity and variability as fundamental ecological features, see Scoones (494–96). On historical difference as a challenge to ecological models, see Scoones (490–92).
9. Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan’s collection attempts to use the body–world dualism “consciously, with the aim of dismantling the usual categories of analysis” (11).
10. See Janković (esp. 33–54).
11. See Aristotle (341.b.7–10). Further citations are given in the text by section.

12. On the dominance of Aristotelian methods and structures in early modern meteorology, see Heninger. For recent studies of weather symbology after the early modern period, see Jan Golinski, Lucian Boia, and Brian Cathcart.
13. For the claim that “emotions were a body’s weather”, see Gail Kern Paster (139).
14. Other modifiers for the word include rough, loud, hot, cold, the compounds “weather-beaten”, “weather-bitten” and the related term (which I discuss below) “weathercock”. The word appears most often in *The Winter’s Tale* (six times, three in 3.3).
15. These plays treat the weather in the contexts of religious meaning, political allegory, humoral physiology, and empirical experience, among other discourses. Rastell’s Aristotelian presentation of elemental mixing and education by experience, the assurances of Heywood’s Jupiter that he will provide “all wethers in all places” (255) and Nashe’s lament for the “uncertain” (195) bliss of the seasonal earth all present weathers that exceed easy explanations.
16. See Watson, Egan, Hiltner, Bowerbank, and McColley. For a helpful recent survey, see Raber. For related criticism, see Linda Woodbridge, Simon Estok, Jeanne Addison Roberts, and Rebecca Bushnell.
17. For an introduction to eco-criticism, see Gerrard. For prominent examples, see Jonathan Bate and Lawrence Buell. For valuable compilations, see Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, Laurence Coupe, and Steven Rosendale. See also website of the American Society of Literature and the environment (<http://www.asle.umn.edu/>). For critical summaries, see Estok, Michael P. Cohen, and O’Dair.
18. For a review of current and future directions in eco-criticism, including the turn towards “stewardship” in new work by John Elder and Glenn Love, see Cohen. On sustainability in literary studies, see Derek Owens.
19. On eco-criticism and early modern literary analysis, see Steve Mentz (“Shipwreck”, “Tongues”).
20. Many eco-critics connect their visions of an integrated world to Arne Naess’s “deep ecology”.
21. William Rueckert inaugurated this school by claiming that “poems can be studied as models for energy flow, community building, and ecosystems” (110), and Bate extends it when he reads Keats’s “To Autumn” as representing an eco-system’s ideal state (103–10).
22. Eco-criticism often rejects what David Ehrenfeld calls the “arrogance of humanism”.
23. Deep ecology, the most radical of these traditions, emphasizes a fundamental compatibility between humankind’s “biological heritage” and the world’s “intricate, living diversity” (Naess 23). On deep ecology and environmentalism, see Gerrard (22).
24. See Thomas. On the co-existence of “weak anthropocentrism” and “anthropomorphism” alongside theologically based “strong anthropocentrism”, see Bruce Boehrer (1–40). Recent criticism has also explored what Watson calls the tension between seventeenth-century English culture’s “nostalgia for unmediated contact with the world of nature” and its early “pursuit of empirical science” (5).
25. Providentialism was the dominant early modern discourse for catastrophic weather. Alexandra Walsham describes this world-view as “a set of ideological spectacles through which individuals of all social levels and from all positions on the confessional spectrum were apt to view their universe, an invisible prism which helped them to focus the refractory meanings of both petty and perplexing events” (3).
26. The case of *The Tempest* is complicated: the political, rhetorical and dramatic disorder of 1.1 makes it a signature episode of strange weather, but this disorder gets retrospectively contained by the spectators Prospero and Miranda in 1.2.
27. To some extent the weather in *King Lear* simply underlines the play’s genre, thus supporting Joseph Meeker’s claim that comedy, the genre of survival and renovation, is more ecologically friendly than tragedy. See also Bate (180–81).
28. This crisis in the body–nature relationship has proved especially amenable to eco-critical intervention. As Julian Yates observes, “ecological models...offer us a very powerful mode of description that refuses dualistic categories” (188).
29. For helpful introductions to distributed cognition in the context of early modern studies, see John Sutton (“Spongy Brains”) and Evelyn Tribble. On distributed cognition more

- generally, see Sutton (*Philosophy*), Gavriel Salomon, and Andy Clark (*Being There, Mindware, Natural-Born*).
30. Sutton makes this point explicitly: “[e]arly modern studies are thus a doubly appropriate partner to the coevolutionary framework [of cognitive science], not just because of the general need to introduce more detailed historical case studies, but because of specific parallels in the way relations between inside and outside, or between brain, body, and world were experienced and conceptualized” (“Spongy Brains” 16). While I agree, I suggest that some early modern representations of the body–world relationship, including *King Lear*, insist that we cannot reject the self’s perceived separation from the world around it, but rather should conceptualize the individual–world relationship as a continuum along which selfhood structures itself. For a parallel attempt to imagine individualism and distributed cognition together, see Salomon. For the application of Salomon’s model to early modern theatrical culture, see Tribble (140).
  31. This understanding of the actor’s body in *King Lear* thus works somewhat counter to recent scholarship on the reciprocal interaction between body and environment in early modern culture. In Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan’s collection, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* exemplifies the porous body, examined in both their introduction (1–13) and Paster’s essay (137–52). By suggesting that Shakespeare’s play presents an understanding of the body–environment relationship that contrasts with Spenser’s epic, I hope to add to critical understandings of the body–world relationship in early modern culture.
  32. *Hamlet* contains 24 examples, *Macbeth* and *All’s Well that Ends Well* 23 each, and *Cymbeline* 19.
  33. See Buell (*Environmental Imagination* 7–8).
  34. On traditional ecology and equilibrium models, see Scoones (481–83), Botkin, and Dove.
  35. The Gentleman’s phrase, “his little world of man”, recalls Sidney’s description of a ship in distress as “that little all we were”. For a reading of this and other depictions of shipwreck as explorations of the limits of Providentialism, see Mentz (“Reason”).
  36. For a classic study of pre-Christian religious practices in the play, see William Elton.
  37. Shakespeare was not alone in presenting this uninviting vision of nature; one of John Dee’s angel interlocutors describes the world as a “monster with many faces”, and a place of “hardnesse”, not hospitality (Deborah Harkness 213).
  38. Virgil’s appeal to causation appears in *Aeneid* 1.6: “Musa, mihi causas memora.” On causation and the epic tradition, see Susanne L. Wofford.
  39. Coupe notably dedicates *The Green Studies Reader* to Danby’s memory.
  40. The OED first cites the word “weathercock” in 1300, and in early modern usage it serves as a metaphor for change (e.g. in Greene’s *Menaphon* [1589], *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*).
  41. Danby reads these lines as Shakespeare mediating between the “benignant nature” he associates with Bacon and Hooker (and Lear himself) and the “malignant nature” of Hobbes (and Edmund) (15–53).
  42. This nightmare vision rejects the Christian “Law of Nature” that Richard Hooker describes in *Ecclesiastical Polity*. Hooker’s lawless nature occasions *King Lear*-like rhetoric – “if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself” – and then asks mercy for human insufficiency: “what would [then] become of man himself, whom these things now do serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world?” Hooker’s sense of natural “obedience” as the “stay” of universal order clarifies the theological stakes of Lear’s storm (43).
  43. For a suggestive reading of the stage history and cultural symbolism of the storm scenes, see Henry S. Turner.
  44. The phrase, Hadot observes, has been interpreted as meaning, “all that lives tends to die; that nature is hard to know; that it wraps itself in sensible forms and myths; . . . that it hides occult virtues within it . . . that Being is originally in a state of contraction and non-unfolding; and . . . that Being unveils itself as it veils itself” (315).
  45. Glotfelty and Fromm claim that any reader of late twentieth-century literary criticism “would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics . . . but . . . would never suspect that the earth’s life support systems were under stress” (xvi).

46. See Cohen, who cites Love as embodying eco-criticism's redemptionist impulse, which derives ultimately from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962).
47. Danby notably treats Hooker and Bacon together as one "benignant nature" paradigm (15–53).
48. Much recent scholarship has explored the "re-enchantment" of the modern and post-modern world, in contrast to the Weberian "disenchantment" of modernity. See Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, and Morris Berman.
49. Timothy Morton's claim that "Nature is what keeps coming back, an inert, horrifying presence and a mechanical repetition", contains a plea for something like literary culture's making-artificial of the natural world (201).

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