

JENNIFER MUNROE,  
EDWARD J. GEISWEIDT  
AND LYNNE BRUCKNER



# ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EARLY MODERN ENGLISH TEXTS

A Field Guide to Reading and Teaching



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A Field Guide to Reading and Teaching

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ASHGATE

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**Mary (Mimi) C. Fenton** is Professor of English and Dean of the Graduate School and Research at Western Carolina University. She served as President of the Milton Society in 2011. She is author of *Milton’s Places of Hope: Spiritual and Political Connections of Hope with Land* (Ashgate, 2006), and co-editor (with Louis Schwartz) of *Their Maker’s Image: New Essays on John Milton* (Susquehanna, 2010) and *To Repair the Ruins: Reading Milton* (Duquesne University Press, 2013), as well as many articles and book chapters. Widely recognized for her excellence in teaching, Fenton’s awards include the Modern Language Association/South Atlantic Departments of English, Outstanding Teacher Award (2006), the University of North Carolina Board of Governors’ Award for Excellence in Teaching (2004), and the Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award, WCU (2002–2003).

**Carla Freccero** is Professor and Chair of the departments of Literature and History of Consciousness at University of California Santa Cruz, where she has taught since 1991. She is the author of *Father Figures: Genealogy and Narrative Structure in Rabelais*; *Popular Culture: An Introduction*; and *Queer/Early/Modern*, in addition to essays on early modern and postmodern literature and culture, feminist and queer theory and criticism, psychoanalysis, and animal studies. She is co-editor, with Aranye Fradenburg, of *Premodern Sexualities*; with Claire Jean Kim of a special issue of *American Quarterly* on Species, Race, Sex; and with Matthew Senior and David L. Clark of a special issue of *Yale French Studies* on *Animots*. Her in-progress book is *Animal Inscriptions*.

**Edward J. Geisweidt** is a Lecturer in the English Department at the University of New Haven. His work has been published in the volumes *The Return of Theory in Early Modern English Studies, Volume 2* (Palgrave, 2014) and *Ecocritical*

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**Ken Hiltner** is a Professor at University of California Santa Barbara, where he holds appointments in both the English and Environmental Studies Departments. His first book, *Milton and Ecology* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), explored the ideological underpinnings of the current environmental crisis by way of Milton's radical reevaluation of dualistic theology, metaphysical philosophy, and early modern subjectivism. His second monograph, *What Else Is Pastoral? Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (Cornell University Press, 2011), expanded the arguments of *Milton and Ecology* into a broader ecocritical consideration of Renaissance literature from Petrarch through the seventeenth century. He has edited or co-edited three collections of essays: *Renaissance Ecology: Imagining Eden in Milton's England* (Duquesne University Press, 2008), *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2011), and *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader* (Routledge, 2014). He regularly teaches Milton from an ecocritical perspective, and he is currently Director of UC Santa Barbara's Environmental Humanities Center.

**Rebecca Laroche** is Professor of English at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. She has published on Shakespeare, early modern women's writing, medical history, and ecofeminism. In 2009, her monograph, *Medical Authority and Englishwomen's Herbal Texts, 1550–1650*, was published by Ashgate, and in 2011, she was the Guest Curator of the exhibition “Beyond Home Remedy: Women, Medicine, and Science” at the Folger Shakespeare Library and co-editor (with Jennifer Munroe) of *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*. She is currently considering the importance of the collective experiential knowledge of plants in Shakespeare's oeuvre and co-authoring *Shakespeare and Ecofeminist Theory*, again with Jennifer Munroe, for the Arden *Shakespeare and Theory* series.

**Leah S. Marcus** is Edwin Mims Professor of English at Vanderbilt University. She has published widely on Shakespeare, editorial theory and practice, Milton, and seventeenth-century poetry, and has recently become interested in ecocriticism, with an ecocritical approach to *King Lear* forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy* and an article on the “pathetic fallacy,” pastoral, and the development of science forthcoming in *Australian Literary Studies* as part of a special issue on the afterlives of pastoral.

**Jennifer Munroe** is Associate Professor of English at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, where she teaches courses in early modern English poetry and prose, Shakespeare, ecocriticism, gender studies, literary theory, and film. She is author of *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature* (Ashgate, 2008) and editor of *Making Gardens of Their Own: Gardening Manuals For Women, 1550–1750* (Ashgate, 2007). Munroe is also co-editor, with Rebecca

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**Jessica Rosenberg** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Miami and the Provost's Postdoctoral Scholar in the Humanities at the University of Southern California. Her current project, *Botanical Publics: Horticulture and Textual Culture in Early Modern England*, traces the plants, flowers, and trees ubiquitous in the poetic and practical books of early modern England, delineating a botanical poetics that conceived both the printed word and the natural world as composites of small pieces, recirculated and reassembled by new publics of readers and planters. Drawing on the history of the book and the history of science, her work examines the formative connections between poetry, print, and the natural world in early modern England.

**Jeffrey Theis** is Associate Professor of English at Salem State University. He is author of *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England*, a study of forests and pastoral in writings from Shakespeare to Milton, as well as several ecocritically

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# Foreword

Carla Freccero

*University of California Santa Cruz*

Once upon a time, ecological approaches to early modernity might have meant simply an attention to nature and the animate nonhuman in literary representation. Indeed, it is astonishing how often nature and/or the nonhuman have been read out of early and modern textuality, whether allegorized into human symbolic meaning or treated as colorful backdrop or “landscape” for the human actors on center stage. Ecology—the study of the house—in Western modernity has receded in favor of economics, the management of the house. Though these two words are joined at the root, so to speak, their divergences are striking, for while the latter finds its early modern capitalist birth as the practice of managing that micro-economy, the household, and the human and nonhuman contained within it, the former emerges much later, in biologist Ernst Haeckel’s nineteenth-century coinage as *ökologie*, and the house in question is now the *habitat* (nature) (Kurtz, “Economics” and “Ecology”). Ironically, there are ways in which both “house” and “habitat” have suffered similar fates in Western history and culture—and many of the authors in this volume address the question of nature and “the feminine” as relegated to the same side of cultural binaries and as similarly left out of various sociocultural equations. For example, while in early modernity at least economics retained its significance as *household* management, best illustrated by Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, “political economy” in the eighteenth century and “economics” in the nineteenth century intervened to efface this earlier meaning, which now goes by the redundant name of “home ec.”<sup>1</sup> One might also surmise that the current late capitalist conjuncture—and the planetary impasse at which we seem to have arrived—finds its source in the genealogy of the radical divergence between economics and ecology, the one—a human activity centered on human productive life—taking precedence over the other for the greater part of a millennium. This is not entirely the case, however, for the authors in this volume also track the struggles that emerge, in early modernity, between economics and ecology, from radical deforestation to the life-affirming properties of slime and ooze, and their interimplications in both *loci horribili* and *loci amoeni*.

This volume embraces an eclectic and generous vision of “ecological approaches,” from ecocriticism and animal studies, to population studies and biopolitics, to thing theory and the representation of nature. It is willing to take the risk of presentist activism even as it does not insist that its ranks comprise solely

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<sup>1</sup> See Freccero, “Ideological Fantasies,” and “Economy, Woman, and Renaissance Discourse.”



those engaged in such activist projects. It does not attempt to lay contradiction to rest, but prefers to hold open a space of difference for what is still an emergent field. It also combines theory and practice, reading and pedagogy. It brings back the cultural meanings of habitat and the natural meanings of home, restoring ecology to *oikos* and vice versa. Indeed, it reminds us that culture (like nature, like women) is often on the side of the ecological as what resists the ferocious pace of the Anthropocene and one of its agents, capitalism, from within.

\* \* \*

Genealogical narratives are fables in the sense that Jacques Derrida gives to this term when he meditates on the nature of stories about “the beast and the sovereign”; they are narratives that willfully exemplify or allegorize, not to mention anthropomorphize.<sup>2</sup> They tell stories rather than purport to recount history, all the while offering up critical historical interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Here, then, is my genealogical fable: I want to posit that the particular way of thinking in the West called human exceptionalism is, while not recent, at least recently hegemonic. My name for the break that eventually results in the hegemony of the belief in human exceptionalism is René Descartes. The *Discourse and Meditations* posit the nonhuman animal as a machine.<sup>4</sup> But more, Descartes posits the body itself as an animated machine. In the history of materialist ontologies, this is surely one of the strangest. The animal body, any animate body, is an automaton, a collection of limbs, a “machine,” he says, made of bones and flesh. Thus what makes humans human—what we’ve come to call the cogito or reason—shows up, literally, as a *deus ex machina* to save the day.<sup>5</sup> It is only by virtue of positing a soul that the human is saved from the fate of the parrot—to parrot the human. Animal spirits move the body like a clock. Ironically, as others have noted, while divesting animal life and the body of inspirited agency, Descartes also opens up the possibility of agential machines, the cyborg of Donna Haraway’s manifesto.<sup>6</sup> As against this conception of embodiment, philosophers such as Michel de Montaigne confer upon nonhuman and human “nature” a wealth of eccentric intelligences, in addition to “soul, and life, and reason” (330).<sup>7</sup> For it is Montaigne who says, famously, “when I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me?” (331), according her both intention and agency. Not only, then, is the nonhuman companion afforded an interiority aberrant in the Cartesian universe, but she also has a gender. And as animal studies historians know, European premodernity was, at times, juridically willing to address the question of intentionality in nonhuman

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<sup>2</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*.

<sup>3</sup> See Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”

<sup>4</sup> Descartes.

<sup>5</sup> See especially Part V of Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*.

<sup>6</sup> Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs.”

<sup>7</sup> Montaigne, “Apology for Raymond Sebond.”

agents of transgression.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Vanita Seth argues that, until the nineteenth century, Western Europe conferred animacy and agency upon a host of nonhuman actors, from gods to nature.<sup>9</sup>

Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* offers an exemplary pre-Cartesian scene of encounter.<sup>10</sup> Léry idealized the people and the surrounding nonhuman environment that Europe had just discovered on the other side of the Atlantic, and he imagined, like Montaigne, that the peoples of the so-called New World were closer to "natural" man than his compatriots.<sup>11</sup> Like Montaigne, Léry could imagine the nonhuman animal belonging to an order of being not significantly different from his own.<sup>12</sup> In *Unrequited Conquests*, Roland Greene makes the point that for early European travelers, Brazil seemed a world of objects.<sup>13</sup> He notes, however, that a logic of counterobjectification is also at work in the Brazilian encounter; in the colonial lyric economy of subject-object relations, these positions are open to destabilization, from the infamous instances of a European becoming "meat" to the unsettling reversal that occurs when Léry and his companions encounter a lizard:

We saw on a little rise a lizard much bigger than a man's body . . . its head raised high and its eyes gleaming, it stopped short to look at us. . . . After it had stared at us for about a quarter of an hour, it suddenly turned around; crashing through the leaves and branches where it passed—with a noise greater than that of a stag running through a forest—it fled back uphill. . . . It occurred to me since, in accord with the opinion of those who say that the lizard takes delight in the human face, that this one had taken as much pleasure in looking at us as we had felt fear in gazing upon it. (Léry, 82–3)

Greene examines how the passage cites and mimics Petrarch's canzone 23, the canzone of the metamorphoses, where the poet-subject is the voyeuristic Acteon caught in his (female) object's gaze and transformed into a stag.<sup>14</sup> In this passage, as Greene remarks, "agency and subjectivity are ceded to the lizard" (123). The apotropaic effect that the Frenchmen have had on the lizard—it stands still to stare at them—reverses itself and freezes them in turn ("we looked at each other stunned, and remained stock-still," 123). Léry's text imagines a subjective reciprocity between human and lizard where fear and desire commingle in a mesmerizing exchange of gazes and emotions.<sup>15</sup> The self-objectifying projection that consists in

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<sup>8</sup> Ferry and Germé, esp. 319–35, where they reprint early modern court cases involving pigs and insects, among other nonhumans.

<sup>9</sup> Seth.

<sup>10</sup> Léry.

<sup>11</sup> Montaigne, "Of Cannibals."

<sup>12</sup> Magnone.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Greene.

<sup>14</sup> Petrarch.

<sup>15</sup> See also my discussion of Petrarch's canzone 23 in Freccero, "Ovidian Subjectivities in Early Modern Lyric."

imagining the lizard to be gazing at a human face as upon a beautiful surface not only accords agency and subjectivity to the lizard, but also renders passive—and, in the lyric tradition from which this passage derives its erotic force, feminine—the human object of that gaze. As Greene writes of Léry's impulse, throughout the *History* and most especially in the "colloquy," where Léry demonstrates his knowledge of the Tupi language, "the kind of objectification that Columbus and many others apply to the Indians, these Europeans adapt to themselves, dissolving their own bodies into discrete aesthetic and functional parts with a relish that suggests the unrequited desire of becoming an object" (128).

What Greene calls counterobjectification may, however, also be thought about through the surrealism-inspired analysis of Roger Callois and thus in a more ecological vein. Callois—whose work Jacques Lacan made use of his analysis of the mirror stage—suggests that the phenomenon of mimicry in insects, rather than emerging as an evolutionary response to the need to confound predators or trick prey, may be the experience of the lure of space, the becoming-environment of the animal.<sup>16</sup> Although for Callois this appeal of space—a "becoming-nature" in Deleuzian terms—is tantamount to a loss of vitality, one might also understand the self-abandonment entailed as the relinquishing of boundaries in favor of the ecological, a systemic and interconnected togetherness of being and habitat.<sup>17</sup>

There is a world of complexity around questions of nature, the human, ontology, subjectivity, and agency in the premodern and early modern world we inherit in the West. This volume explores some of that complexity and revives, for readers, a sense of the ways current ecological concerns do not appear full-blown for the very first time in the modern era. To be sure, as in the example from Léry's account, many of those questions take an unfamiliar form; yet others that this volume explores seem strikingly familiar. Finally, this volume offers readers an excellent field guide to the most practical and intimate aspects of theoretical and methodological endeavor: reading and teaching. *Ecological Approaches to Early Modern English Texts* is thus itself an ecological endeavor, integrating scholarship and the communities it comprises into an ecosystem of the human and nonhuman living.

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<sup>16</sup> Callois; Lacan. See also Freccero, "Mirrors of Culture."

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari.

# Introduction

Jennifer Munroe, Lynne Bruckner, and Edward J. Geisweidt

I remembered that contact zones called ecotones, with their edge effects, are where assemblages of biological species form outside their comfort zones. These interdigitating edges are the richest places to look for ecological, evolutionary, and historical diversity. . . . Our house is along a creek in a steep valley, where walking up from the creek on either northern- or southern-facing hillsides puts one dramatically into changing ecologically mixed-species assemblages. Natural cultural histories are written on the land, such that the former plum orchards, sheep pastures, and logging patterns vie with geological soil types and humidity changes to shape today's human and nonhuman inhabitants of the land.

*Donna Haraway, When Species Meet (217)*

As we editors write this introduction, the coal, oil and gas industries are engaging in mountain-top mining, tar-sands oil extraction, and hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”). Driven by humans’ ongoing reliance on fossil fuels, these processes result in massive environmental degradation and harm to all living species. The process begins with clear-cutting forests or destroying farmland to create a well pad of 5 to 15 acres. A wastewater pool of 3–5 acres and approximately 20 feet deep is then dug and lined with plastic—a polymer that can (and does) tear<sup>1</sup> Next, holes (conventionally called wells) are drilled roughly 7,000 feet deep and, from that depth, another 1 or 2 miles horizontally. The well shaft is lined with casing and cement to inhibit chemicals and gas from leeching into the soil, streams, and aquifers (although leeching too often occurs). Millions of gallons of water are trucked in to the site, often pulled from nearby streams and lakes, never to be returned to the watershed. Explosives are detonated to fracture the shale, followed by the injection of up to 7 million gallons of “slick water” (water mixed with “secret,” proprietary toxic chemicals and sand and ceramic “proppants”), at pressures of up to 9,000 pounds per inch. The chemical-laced water “shatter[s] the shale for a few yards on either side of the pipe . . . , allowing the gas to rise under its own pressure and escape” (McGraw qtd. in McKibben, “Why Not Frack?” 2).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, a deer was pulled dead from one such pond. Before her death, she made a tear in the plastic (Griswold).

<sup>2</sup> One estimate finds that during the process nearly 8 percent of raw methane escapes; although natural gas burns cleaner than coal, in its raw form it is a “far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide” (Humes 56). When the release of raw methane is combined with the immense amount of energy used in hydraulic fracking, fracked natural gas becomes “the dirtiest fossil fuel of all in terms of climate change” (Humes 56, citing a Cornell study).

Fracking rips the earth apart, bringing to the surface elements that for 350,000 million years have remained buried a mile below.

These practices, as well as those that seem more benign, like simply driving to work each day, are arguably destructive, and their reciprocal effects on nonhuman and human nature point to how we are all inherently (and always) integrated.<sup>3</sup> Affecting the lives of human and nonhumans, that is, the practice of hydraulic fracturing also exposes points of contact between multiple species, human and nonhuman alike. Such mutuality of presence resonates with, even if for very different purposes, the notion of contact zones, adapted from the linguistic concept of “contact languages” by anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt. Biologist and ecofeminist Donna Haraway demonstrates the rich deployability of the concept, discussing contact zones in science fiction, ecotones, conservation projects, canine-with-human agility sports, and elsewhere. Haraway extends to human and nonhuman intra-action Pratt’s anthropocentric observation that “‘subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other . . . in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power’” (Pratt qtd. in Haraway, *When Species Meet* 216). There is a politics to seeking understanding in contact spaces, for mono-dimensional and isolated ways of knowing underwrite inequities in power. The natural gas industry, for example, insists on an exceptionally narrow definition of fracking. While for most people fracking has become a catch-all term for an entire process of natural gas extraction, oil and gas companies use “fracking” exclusively to refer to the process of shooting slick water down the well under pressure. This non-interlocking definition allows corporate magnates like Rex Tillerson of ExxonMobil to tell Congress that “There have been over a million wells hydraulically fractured in the history of the industry, and there is not one, not one, reported case of a freshwater aquifer having ever been contaminated from hydraulic fracturing” (qtd. in Humes).<sup>4</sup> Strategically negating the empathetic relationships that occur in contact spaces, such linguistic maneuvers uphold human exceptionality. This collection seeks to mitigate such narrow, binaristic thinking, not only when it comes to humans and the biotic world, but also in relation to language, texts, ideas, culture, politics, history, the present—for they are all interconnected.

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<sup>3</sup> As ecofeminist and literary scholar Stacy Alaimo contends, one’s very self is substantially interconnected to the world. Since the material self cannot be disentangled from networks that are simultaneously, economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial what was once the ostensibly bounded human subject enters a swirling landscape of uncertainty where practices and actions that were once not even remotely ethical or political matters suddenly become the very stuff of the crisis at hand. (“Sustainable This” 561)

<sup>4</sup> It is disturbing, as well, that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has now isolated its study of fracking to drinking water—a crucial concern, but far from the only one. See the EPA’s “Questions and Answers” website at <http://www2.epa.gov/hfstudy/questions-and-answers-about-epas-hydraulic-fracturing-study#6>.

Using the notion of contact zones allows us to navigate alternatives to the paradigm of human-dominant/“Nature”-subordinate and to see that relationship instead as co-presence and an interaction that shapes these multiple agents rather than presupposes that the human agent shapes the “Natural” other. Or, in other words, a focus on contact zones enables us to correct what Val Plumwood calls the “foundational delusion of the West”: “The idea that human life takes place in a self-enclosed, completely humanized space that is somehow independent of an inessential sphere of nature which exists in a remote space ‘somewhere else’” (*Environmental Culture* 26). Contact zones redress this delusion, and resonate with Plumwood’s call for an “interspecies politics and ethics which ventures beyond the polarized configurations that classify the world into contrasting sides of human and Other, or alternatively in terms of human and similar [or, nature as analogue to the human]” (*Environmental Culture* 31). In this way, *Ecological Approaches to Early Modern English Texts* is similar in purpose to the recent early modern ecocritical collection *The Indistinct Human*, edited by Jean Feerick and Vin Nardizzi, who write that their volume “contributes to this ecocritical project by bringing to light early modern discourses of creaturely *overlap* that have been over-shadowed by triumphalist accounts of the Renaissance as an era of man’s preeminence” (5, emphasis ours).

*Ecological Approaches to Early Modern English Texts* applies this notion of contact zones to what Haraway calls “naturalcultural and multispecies matters,”<sup>5</sup> serving as a reminder that human and nonhuman nature are inextricably linked in ways even the most zealous of environmentalists often underestimate, and policymakers (and corporate magnates) often deny altogether. After all, it is not by accident that Haraway’s application of contact zones foregrounds how humans and nonhumans are mutually “subjects,” for she writes, “the fleshly historical reality of face-to-face, body-to-body subject making across species is denied or forgotten in the humanist doctrine that holds only humans to be true subjects with real histories” (*When Species Meet* 66–7).<sup>6</sup> In the case of fracking, what appears to be simply a hole with limited consequences, and seemingly under the control of human agents, turns out to have far-reaching and unanticipated effects. This collection frames early modern ecostudies around the insistence that nonhuman entities—from beasts to roses and the rich, peaty soil beneath them—are indeed

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<sup>5</sup> While Haraway does not define “naturalcultural” in *When Species Meet*, her usage (and as we mean it here) is aligned with that of the CFP for the 2010 “NatureCulture” conference: “An expansive notion that ignores traditional divisions among spheres of life, natureculture also blurs disciplinary boundaries and creatively connects fields of knowledge” (<http://sca.culanth.org/meetings/sca/2010/intro.html>).

<sup>6</sup> See also Val Plumwood in *Environmental Culture*, where she similarly calls for us to reorient ourselves to the agency of nonhuman when she writes, “The nature we would recognize in a non-reductive model is not a mere human absence or conceptually dependent Other, not a mere precondition for our own star-stuff of achievement, but can be seen as an active, collaborative presence capable of agency and other mindlike qualities” (16).

agents, and that the meaningfulness of ecocritical scholarship productively expands when it is alert to interstitial spaces and contact zones.

This volume offers chapters that meditate on these possibilities and demonstrates a methodology, by way of integrating theory, readings, and teaching approaches, that also looks for interactivity and “interlocking” practices. The chapters are situated in discrete sections that serve as zones of connectivity. Each chapter is located in the multiple spaces between the binaries that underwrite human dominance: semiotic-somatic, linguistic-material, natural-cultural, human-nonhuman, present-historical, pedagogical-scholarly, affective-intellectual. Moreover, the volume as a whole provides opportunities for additional contact spaces, as the chapters are implicitly in conversation with each other and as they suggest methodologies that cross boundaries and invite new points of contact, sometimes uncovering asymmetrical balances of power within history and the present.

This collection understands the notion of contact zones as a way, first and foremost, to rethink the extent to which we understand the relationship between human and nonhuman nature in material versus symbolic terms. In her landmark 2007 “Recent Ecocritical Studies of English Renaissance Literature,” Karen Raber reminds us that ecocriticism is at its core a field of study that focuses on the “*physical* natural world” (151, emphasis hers) and that the “material environment is always resistant to reconstruction” (168). And one year later, in the introduction to *Early Modern Ecostudies: From the Florentine Codex to Shakespeare*, the first truly ecocritical volume on early modernity, Raber and her co-editor Thomas Hallock underscore the “vexed relationship” between the physical and the symbolic. “How,” they ask, “do scholars who traffic in symbol reconcile cultural constructs and the bedrock of nature?” (2). Raber and Hallock observe that ecocritics have yet to “reconcile a foundational paradox: the vexed relationship between symbolic ‘Nature’ and the concrete, physical environment”—noting, nonetheless, that “Nature cannot exist solely as a cultural category, or there would be nothing to physically engage with, nothing *real* that an activist politics could save” (2).

The question of materiality, one approach to the sort of paradox Raber and Hallock describe, has been embraced by numerous ecocritical scholars of late. A number of contributors to this volume draw upon the work of political ecologist Jane Bennett, whose *Vibrant Matter* has become an influential text in addressing this question. Bennett posits all things as interlocking, interagential matter, human and nonhuman alike, participating in a shared and ongoing creation of evolving new matter. For those interested in thinking about the human/nonhuman relationship by way of matter, it is crucial to see them (in the collective sense) as constructs, not of language, but as collective participants in what might be termed “co-actants.”<sup>7</sup> But there is no sure agreement among ecocritical scholars as to the extent to which culture figures in the “natural” of the material. While Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* acknowledges the importance of ethics and the political ecology of

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<sup>7</sup> See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, for example.



things, her discussion of “thing power” tends to exclude social/historical context and power relations—the experience of things in everyday life. Ecofeminist scholars, for instance, have insisted that if we do not include social practices and devote time to recovering how humans and nonhumans live (and have lived in the past) in contexts where power inequalities exist, we risk reifying these inequalities themselves in our scholarship and our lives. Still, the differences among us tend to be more of degree than kind, thus making the need to increase our scholarly contact zones within ecocriticism rather than our further partitioning still more urgent.

Studying literatures and ecologies of the past ushers in certain challenges—the inability, for example, to physically touch and inhabit the things of the material world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> While materiality has become increasingly central for early modern scholars, this paradox lingers, as is evident not only in this collection but in others as well. Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche frame their collection, *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*, around this question, as they propose “a mindful reevaluation of our scholarly practices as well as the material and literary practices of those men and women of the past . . . and [an] understanding such practices in that historical moment has bearing on the very ecological questions we face today” (2). Such questions are of import in the context of global climate change as much as they are in the context of the recent cultural, political, and institutional backlash against the Humanities and the Arts, as highlighted by Robert N. Watson in his chapter in this collection. As the editors of *Science, Literature and Rhetoric in Early Modern England* write, “The relationships between words and things, the named and the unnamed, topic of argument and ‘matters of fact,’ were starting points for the new ways of presenting and understanding knowledge, and affected the development of both the arts and sciences” (2).<sup>9</sup> The way the chapters in this collection represent attempts to understand knowledge, or consider the “relationship between words and things” (and nonhumans and humans as things) is indeed a starting point, one that we hope will prompt further inquiry and illuminate our inherent embeddedness within zones of contact more than it does to create the illusion of new fissures, across and within our disciplines. We hope above all that this collection generates debate as well as empathy (even compassion) for multiple perspectives and positions, an awareness of and commitment to our shared goals and purpose, even when we disagree.

Our contributors expand on the work of scholars who have of late explored the materiality and agentic potential, not only of early modern animals, but also

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<sup>8</sup> “The recovery of early modern ‘nature’ is crucial to any historically oriented ecocriticism, yet some dimension of the material environment of the past is always resistant to reconstruction” (Hallock and Raber 2).

<sup>9</sup> Cummins and Burchel.



trees, plants, minerals, weather, water, soil, and stones.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the relationship between the material and the symbolic/linguistic is something of a *mise-en-abyme*, and continues to be a thorny issue for ecocritics. We regularly use language culled from the nonhuman world (e.g., “thorny”), even as we map our own taxonomies and constructed categories onto material nature. And our expression of the relationship between the human and nonhuman world is, especially as it relates to the domain of literary scholars, intrinsically linguistic. But such linguistic expression situates the human/nonhuman relationship in a most problematic way. We need only to consider Greg Garrard’s critique of Kate Soper’s now-famous statement that “it is not language that has a hole in its ozone layer.”<sup>11</sup> As Garrard so astutely observes, in the very moment we recognize the truth of Soper’s statement, language reasserts itself, as “words such as ‘hole’ and ‘layer’ are in fact strictly metaphorical in this context.”<sup>12</sup> Our understanding of contact zones, therefore, is always at once both an endeavor of recovery—of the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman nature in its most material as well as symbolic form—and a reminder that such an endeavor generates as many holes as it presumes to repair.

This collection also seeks to establish zones of contact between methodologies that might otherwise seem at odds. Presentism and historicism serve as different points of contact between the past and present, a dichotomy not easily resolved within early modern scholarship, since our understanding of the past is always shaped in part at least by the nagging questions relevant to our present circumstances; and early modern ecocritics in particular struggle to find balance between historical study and an imperative to address today’s ecological crises. For those working as early modern ecocritics, environmental degradation and notions of ecological stewardship (though understood differently than in our current era) are recognized as salient and prevalent concerns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But more than the question of whether or not it is legitimate to study the nexus of early modern culture and contemporary ecological concerns, the very divide between present and past represents an area of important debate, one that this collection is invested in bringing into more direct dialogue. How are we to approach early modern ecologies, and to what end? Is it to understand the roots of our current ecological crisis, to rethink the dominant and constructed boundary between human and nonhuman—a boundary that descends from Cartesian thinking? Is it to recover a way of understanding the human as part of the natural world, rather than apart from it? Certainly. All of these questions are germane both

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<sup>10</sup> Such diverse elements of nature and their intersections with the human were apparent in the recent Nonhuman Renaissance seminars at the 2012 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America; such diversity is also found in *The Indistinct Human* and a special issue of *postmedieval* focusing on ecomaterialism, edited by Jeffrey J. Cohen and Lowell Duckert.

<sup>11</sup> Soper, *What Is Nature?* 168. Heise provides a useful discussion of Garrard on Soper, “Teaching,” 47–9.

<sup>12</sup> Heise, “Teaching.”

to our understanding of the Renaissance and our current era. But the questions of “to what end?” and “with what methodology?” persist.

The presentist/historicist debate has been, and will likely remain, a lively one, and rather than asserting the primacy of one over another, the chapters in this collection propose multiple approaches that look for the interconnectedness of the two. In 2011, Sharon O’Dair—one of the scholars closely tracking and commenting on the development of the field—asked “Is it Shakespearean ecocriticism if it is not presentist, politically engaged in and with the world we inhabit now?” O’Dair’s answer is a resounding “no.”<sup>13</sup> And yet, in her 2011 essay in *Shakespeare Studies*, she takes a more inclusive stance, asserting that “all approaches—the local, the global, the presentist, the historicist, the theoretical, and the activist—must remain in play in order to contribute to our discourses about the planet and to ecological action in the present moment” (75). The first section of this collection engages this debate, as Watson, Hiltner, and Munroe all consider (with different points of pressure on historical and presentist concerns, and with Munroe bringing gender into the mix) the implications of these questions for early modern ecostudies. And contributors throughout the volume struggle with them as well, as they seek points of contact between the present and the past.

What this volume makes clear, even in these opening paragraphs, is that there are necessarily multiple and conflicting views when it comes to eco-approaches to early modern literature, and that the field has become increasingly complex; in fact, as we argue here, and as the chapters in this collection illustrate, early modern ecostudies benefits from the multiplicity, the intellectual biodiversity, generated by such conflict. Over the past decade early modern ecocriticism has been a rapidly growing area, characterized by the vitality that emerges with new perspectives. While many have been in the conversation from the start—1998, by Simon Estok’s estimation<sup>14</sup>—those who are new to the field or those who want to introduce others to early modern ecocriticism can no longer direct individuals to just a handful of scholarly works.

Indeed, despite O’Dair’s early argument for “Slow Shakespeare”—a more artisanal, less career-driven approach to ecocritical scholarship—the proliferation of ecocritical approaches to the Renaissance (as it is narrowly defined, at least) now includes more than five major collections and nearly twenty monographs.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This chapter appears in *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, ed. Bruckner and Brayton.

<sup>14</sup> See *Shakespeare Review* 33, 135, n.39. Cited as “first published instance where the words ‘Shakespeare’ and ‘ecocriticism’ appeared together” in Estok’s *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare*.

<sup>15</sup> Recent collections include Raber and Hallock, ed.; Hiltner, ed., *Renaissance Ecology*; Bruckner and Brayton; Munroe and Laroche; and Feerick and Nardizzi. Relevant monographs have been written by Borlik, Bowerbank, Brayton, Bushnell, Eklund (forthcoming), Egan (*Green Shakespeare*), Estok (*Ecocriticism*), Hiltner (two), Knight, Laroche, Mentz, Munroe (*Gender and the Garden*), Nardizzi (*Wooden O’s*), Raber (*Animal Bodies*), Theis (*Writing the Forest*), Tigner (*Literature*), and Watson (*Back to Nature*). For animal studies, see the works by Boehrer, Fissell, Floyd-Wilson, Fudge, Raber, Shannon

There are at least two special clusters on early modern ecocriticism in signal journals, and new pieces are appearing in journals with great frequency. If we include cognate fields—such as the history of science, animal studies, or food studies, the list spirals to well beyond a clear count. In recent years the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) has featured seminars focused on “green” topics, demonstrating the growing interest in this area of inquiry. In fact, there was so much interest in the 2012 SAA seminar on the “nonhuman,” that the seminar leaders elected to divide it into two groups. As newer and relevant collections are released, lines of inquiry have become more precise and discrete.

While many of the monographs and collections heretofore published have had a single-focused approach, *Ecological Approaches to Early Modern English Texts* includes multiple approaches in one volume, enacting methodologically and strategically a choice to enact contact zones among areas of inquiry that are often endeavored in isolation. In this collection, readers find chapters that address questions of interest to feminist and queer studies as well as others; and chapters that approach these questions from positions that range from familiar close readings (even if to new ends) to an insistence on how the ecological crises of today can be understood through an investigation of the past. Even more importantly, though, the contents of this volume reflect scholarly, political, and pedagogical positions that look for overlap between these methodologies, that elicit zones of contact that already exist as well as those that might be further cultivated. This volume helps us understand what we mean by ecocriticism (a term within which we include ecofeminism and queer ecostudies, for example, not as ancillary but as integral and independent areas of study), and how it relates to and might inform early modern studies more broadly.

One of the fundamental ways that this collection aims to articulate potential and existing zones of contact is in its three-fold framework inclusive of theory, readings, and teaching approaches. United by a shared commitment to activism—in the private and public sphere as well as in the classroom—the chapters here demonstrate how our investigation of the attitudes about “Nature” from the past can make the greatest impact on the way we approach environmental concerns today, whether that be for scholars or students. Teaching, like the other two areas, is a key concern for ecocritics, many of whom come to their classroom, as they do to their texts, with an interest in activism. After all, pedagogy fits with Ursula Heise’s now-famous statement that ecocriticism requires a “triple allegiance” to the study of literary and cultural representations, scientific literacy, and “the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world” (“Hitchhiker’s Guide” 506), all potentially activated in the garden, the

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(*The Accommodated Animal*), and the important collection *At the Borders of the Human* (ed. Fudge, Gilbert, and Wiseman). For early modern science, see collections including *Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture* and *Science, Literature and Rhetoric in Early Modern England*. Early modern Food Studies includes work by Albala and Fitzpatrick’s collection, *Renaissance Food from Rabelais to Shakespeare*.

classroom, the public sector, and the rare books and manuscript reading rooms in libraries around the world. Pedagogy, it has been argued, is the site where ecocritical literary study meets political engagement (cf., Scott Slovic). Yet, far from constraining readers' political sensibilities under one agenda, the collection offers a spectrum of politically engaged practices—from a recognition of the specifics of historically based perspectives to an appeal for immediate, direct action beyond the classroom's walls. The classroom can be a transformative space in which literary texts might involve students in thoughtful discussions of ecological concepts and environmental concerns, and early modern texts are no exception. Dedicated to enhancing the critical capacities that students of literature are expected to attain (analytical reading, historical understanding, an awareness of the material and affective human condition), this volume also models ways that scholars and teachers can use early modern texts to raise ecological questions and enhance environmental understanding (and vice versa).

While each of the chapters in the Readings and Teaching sections respond to, exemplify, or challenge positions outlined in the Theory chapters, the Readings and Teaching chapters function dialogically to foster an early modern studies form of ecological literacy. In short, we conceive of the chapters in the Readings section as pedagogically valuable for imparting ecological literacy while also modeling it. Similarly, chapters in the Teaching section present new scholarly insights into familiar early modern texts.

*Ecological Approaches to Early Modern English Texts* provides useful, yet nuanced, discussions of ecological approaches to research and teaching a range of representative early modern texts. It seeks to be a snapshot of the field as it stands today—to include core issues and contestatory positions, to represent multiple theoretical and methodological practices, to provide salient and pointed close readings of primary texts by authors whose work has been well excavated by ecocritics, and to bring less canonical writers and cognate fields into the discussion. It would be wrong to say the intent of the volume is to be a cornucopia of ecocritical work. But it would be right to say that the volume casts a wide net in the interest of introducing those issues that are most important in the field today while modeling how to approach various early modern texts through diverse ecocritical methodologies. To that end, we elected to include 17 shorter chapters (4,000–5,000 words), rather than fewer, longer chapters. In these chapters, contributors to the collection put digital archives, the Old Testament, medieval bestiaries, early modern herbals, and treatises on trees in conversation with Marx, Haraway, McKibben, and Pollan. The cross-fertilization of texts in this volume, both within and across chapters, is central to a sound approach to pedagogy, ecocriticism, and early modern literary scholarship.

In the first section, we include three chapters that consider the intersections of how texts and ideas of the past inform our current ecological debates. Both Robert N. Watson and Ken Hiltner address this question directly, each with different emphases on past and present. Refusing singular alignment with either historicists or presentists, Watson sees his project as one of “finding old answers to solve new