Seasons and Sovereigns:
Succession in the Greenworld, 1579 – 1621

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Current scholarship on months, seasons, and climates in Renaissance aesthetics has developed along a two-dimensional axis of pastoral and georgic, leaving critics unable to develop an overarching theory of how or why early modern subjects charted environmental stability over time. *Seasons and Sovereigns* addresses this occlusion by studying the course of nature as it pertains to sudden dissolution, long periods of stability, or constant change in volatile Elizabethan and early Stuart greenworlds.

While environmental stability occupies a central role in two theories of sovereignty – the classical Golden Age, which experienced eternal Spring, and the two-bodied King, where a King’s body politic transcends the vicissitude signified by seasonal change – succession crises required rapid changes. By focusing on exceptions to temperate climates, *Seasons and Sovereigns* argues that many writers of the English Renaissance challenged the prescriptive accounts of innocuous socio-political climates or constant natural spaces by exploring the reasons behind floods, wonders, seasonal usurpation, and other perversions of nature’s course found along the fringes of literary greenworlds.

The project begins by examining Queen Elizabeth’s cult of *ver perpetuum* to justify a more capacious interpretation of the theory of the King’s Two Bodies as it pertains to
the body politic’s exemption from the passage of time, including seasonal change. It contextualizes these issues by delineating how genre studies have responded to the presence of calendars and months in literary texts. Chapter 2 argues that a remarkable number of late sixteenth-century texts flood (or threaten to flood) a greenworld to reflect anxiety over succession. The epic-scale dissolution evoked by sea grottos, Parnassus, and the lost city of Atlantis level social distinctions as unequivocal signs of nature’s lethal heterogeneity in Lyly’s Gallathea, Boboli garden, and Cymbeline.

Chapter 3 argues that Shakespeare replaces an Arcadian landscape with a theater of green wonders and Macduff’s knowledge of seasonal decorum in Macbeth. The chapter begins in the “wake” of the Golden Age with Thomas Dekker’s decision to revive pastoral in his account of the Queen’s funeral in The Wonder-full Yeare, 1603. Chapter 4 shifts the Arcadian impulse inward by exploring resistance to constancy (a pastoral value) in The Changeling, where I juxtapose three normative views of human nature that were active in 1621. Rather than advocate one perspective on constancy, Chapter 5 suggests that Lady Mary Wroth’s heroines in the Urania (1621) dissolve contracts and engage in post-Golden Age political jurisprudence by promoting duplicity and metamorphosis.
Contents

Abstract...........................................................................................................................................iv

List of Figures.......................................................................................................................................viii

Acknowledgements............................................................................................................................ix

1. Introduction: *Ver Perpetuum*........................................................................................................1
   1.1 Key Terms and Generic Kinds........................................................................................................6

2. Succession and the Sea: Epic-Scale Dissolution in Boboli’s Grotto (1583), John Lyly’s *Gallathea* (1583), and Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1610)..................................................17
   2.1 Deluge in Florence, 1583................................................................................................................23
   2.2 “It is but a liquid element:” *Gallathea* in Neptune’s Park...............................................................38
   2.3 “Villain mountaineers” and Postdiluvian Succession in *Cymbeline*.............................................47

3. In the Wake of the Golden Age: Pastoral in Thomas Dekker’s *The Wonder-full yeare* (1603) and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606).................................................................68
   3.1 A Climactic Year.............................................................................................................................68
   3.2 Macbeth’s “primrose way:” Pastoral Disavowal(s) and Green Remedies.................................84

4. “Odd Feeders:” Female Inconstancy and Contract Dissolution in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1621).........................................................................................124
   4.1 Inward Arcadia..............................................................................................................................124
   4.2 Constancy: Nature’s “frequent failty”.........................................................................................137

5. Skepticism in the Greenworld: Competing Constancies in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania* (1621)............................................................................................................................161
List of Figures

Figure 1: Exterior, Buontalenti’s Sea Grotto, Florence………………………………………30
Figure 2: Sheep (detail), Buontalenti’s Sea Grotto, Florence………………………………31
Figure 3: Right wall, Buontalenti’s Sea Grotto, Florence…………………………………...33
Figure 4: Thomas Dekker, frontispiece, The Wonderfull yeare, London………………..74
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1. Introduction:  *Ver Perpetuum*

In a classic example of the generic and stylistic propriety known as seasonal decorum, Edmund Spenser dedicates the month of April in his *Shepheardes Calender* (1579) to Queen Elizabeth: “this AEclogue,” E.K. announces in his preface, “is purposely intended to the honor and prayse of our most gracious souereigne, Queene Elizabeth.”¹ “Fayre Elisa,” the “flowre of Virgins” and the “Queene of shepheardes all,” inaugurates the Spring, the season that flourished without cessation during the Golden Age as a sign that truth and justice reigned in harmony with the natural world. By merging the Queen’s public image with that of Arcadia’s temperate climate, Spenser set an important literary precedent for future poets whose verse needed to evade conflicts directly related

to Elizabethan state policy, including royal succession and the possibility of the Queen’s marriage. As he encouraged reciprocity between pastoral themes (refuge, simplicity, purity) in the literary culture of the late sixteenth-century court and the political need to mystify the passage of time as it pertained to Elizabeth’s age and mortality, Spenser put the literature of greenworlds to work.\(^2\) As a result, a benign socio-political climate and a perpetual, carefree Spring became a powerful literary devices to mask the crisis of the Queen’s successor for aspiring writers and courtiers.

A single, prolonged season unambiguously denied the passage of time, as did the constancy of Elizabeth’s royal motto, *semper eadem*, or “Always the Same.” During royal progresses at Elvetham and Kenilworth, the Queen was greeted with maygames and with summer revels that expressed gratitude for the peace and for the abundance that accompanied her as she traveled throughout her realm. Helen Cooper goes so far as to conclude her study of Elizabethan seasonal panegyric by commenting that, “among the troubles of the world,” at least “the country never knows winter.”\(^3\) However

\(^2\) For poets who follow Spenser in the pastoral mode, see Sukanta Chaudhuri’s *Renaissance Pastoral and its English Developments*. (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1989), chapters six and eight. For Queen Elizabeth’s role in maygames, including Philip Sidney’s pastoral interlude, *Lady of May* (1578), see Helen Cooper’s chapter on “The Shepherd’s Queen” from *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance*. (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer, 1977). Cooper insists that associating the Queen with perpetual Spring is no “mere flattery” but an aesthetic expression of the “genuine need” to embody the greatness of England in the “person of the Queen herself.” See Cooper, p. 197.

\(^3\) Cooper, p. 202. For more on festive holiday and the Queen in the late sixteenth century, see François Laroque’s *Shakespeare’s Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1991) and C.L. Barber’s *Shakespeare’s Festive
artificial or distinct from the course of nature in England’s climate, pastoral eclogues and pastimes honored the Queen with their devotion to eternal Spring.

The aestheticized environments represented by *ver perpetuum* and *semper eadem* demonstrate a reassuring sense of control over the frequently contested biological, legal, and divine rationales of monarchical succession, but many authors (including Spenser) grew skeptical of their central claims and essentially unreachable goals. In the following chapters, I explore resistance among English writers to one of Arcadia’s chief attractions – its unchanging, temperate climate – by demonstrating how some texts placed concern about succession squarely in the greenworld through offering alternate and often widely disparate views of nature’s course. Many writers after 1579 were no longer content to valorize the principles of the Theocritean idyll or to conflate the attributes of the pastoral world with those of the Golden Age in an effort to deny the passage of time. These writers, such as Lyly, Shakespeare, Dekker, and Donne, began to compose pastoral in the Virgilian mode, where floods, natural disasters, and seasonal usurpation, in addition to land dispossession and other conflicts relevant to the state, disrupt the Hortulan moments of festive comedy that increasingly lost credibility after the Queen’s death in

*Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1959). As François Laroque observes, “the myth of the Golden Age and the pastoral dream recur so insistently in the 1590’s after the publication of Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* that it is impossible to explain their success solely by the existence of collective subconscious attitudes. Between the nostalgia and the ideal and underlying the archetypes and conventions, there must have been something that made it possible for what started off as a policy to turn into an aesthetic.” See Laroque, p. 73.
1603. Rather than ignore seasonal difference in favor of a homogenous Arcadia, many writers also found philosophical preferences for the cyclical calendar, despite its constant mutability, for it provided occasions to demonstrate good government.

As a touchstone of Renaissance political thought, the theory of the King’s Two Bodies occupies a central position in this project on environmental constancy and royal succession. The texts that resist Arcadian climates that I foreground in this study are in active dialogue with the theory of the two-bodied King, particularly as it pertains to the metaphysical dispensations allotted to a sovereign’s body politic, including this body’s constancy as reflected in its immunity to seasonal change. According to Elizabethan jurists writing in the mid-sixteenth century, every King has two bodies – a body natural and a body politic – that perfectly converge. As a consequence of this legal fiction, the office of the monarchy succeeded any particular sitting monarch. I complement these underlying metaphysics by arguing that the King’s body politic, that was “utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to,” was void also of defects of season.4 By adding “season” to this list of “natural Defects” or constraints of the body natural, I nuance the theory of the King’s Two Bodies by expanding its purview. This enables the project to anchor its discussions of early modern ecology, which examines the reciprocity between sovereignty,

aesthetics, and natural philosophy, in its historical contexts. The supernatural paradoxes at the heart of a King’s hybrid ontology make sovereignty itself an ideal vehicle to examine the stability of naturalist truth(s) and their political uses in the early modern era, for the very nature of a King is unnatural.

A significant amount of recent work in early modern scholarship has begun to challenge orthodox accounts of inhabiting the body, and now somatic ecology seeks to historicize the Galenic body in the dynamic, seasonal, or constant spaces that surrounded it. Furthermore, as studies of literature such as this consider natural phenomena and current or historical genres, vocabularies, and disciplines that describe, manage, or study the earth and its constitutive elements, we gain deeper insights from creating alliances with fields that study early modern nature(s) from other perspectives: history, philosophy, and sociology of science. In each discipline, the category of the “natural” is a temporarily stable construct and is far from unified, as competing early modern normativities flooded textual culture despite the presence of an orthodox

\footnote{For all practical purposes, embodiment theory historicizes “the natural,” nature, and \textit{a priori} features of bodies, so it too informs this project, especially chapter 1. For strong examples of recent scholarship on ecology, see the work of Steve Connor, such as \textit{The Book of Skin} (London: Reaktion, 2004) or his collected essays, \textit{Atmospherics: Imagining Air}, at \texttt{http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/atmospheres.htm}, or see the work of Bruce Smith \textit{The Acoustic World of Early Modern England} (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999), Svetlana Alpers \textit{The Art of Describing} (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983), and Mary Floyd-Wilson \textit{English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama} (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2003). Earlier examples of embodiment theory include Gail Paster \textit{The Body Embarrassed} (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993), Michael Schoenfeldt \textit{Bodies and Selves} (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1999) and Jonathan Sawday \textit{The Body Emblazoned} (New York: Routledge, 1995), John Sutton \textit{Philosophy and Memory Traces} (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1998).}
courtly aesthetic. In the following study, “Arcadia” tends to designate that which is normative (or natural) in the greenworld: shepherds ought to tend their flocks without the fear of epic-scale floods, women ought to defer to heteromarital contracts without being led astray by nature’s perverse course, divinely-anointed Kings ought to occupy the throne, and a virgin Queen ought to live in perpetual Spring. Arcadian precepts designate any deviation from nature’s course as wondrous.

1.1 Key Terms and Generic Kinds

By directing close attention to the semiotics of natural change in Renaissance texts, Seasons and Sovereigns demonstrates that the course of nature, whether it is mutable or constant, is frequently also a political course that in turn discloses information regarding succession. In order to measure the stability or constancy of nature’s course in the greenworld from a number of perspectives, I use the term “succession” broadly throughout these chapters. Historians typically refer to Elizabeth’s decision to remain unwed as “the” Succession Crisis in the years leading to her death, but I initially use the term to refer to the succession (or the sequence of events) between entire civilizations following an epic-scale flood. Secondly, I interpret succession as the inheritance of land, wealth, and the genetic material signified by blood between generations in individual families. Problematically, succession is only guaranteed by the
constancy of heteromarital contracts that were subject to symbolic dissolution. Thirdly, I note how 1603 was seen as an entire year of cataclysmic wonder to mark the fissure in regnal temporality occasioned by the Queen’s death and the ascension of James Stuart. Finally, I address King James’s difficult relationship to Parliament and the erratic temporality of their legal sessions (1604, 1614, and 1621) in early Stuart England as a variant understanding of Parliamentarian tenure and the sovereign’s ability to dissolve their meetings.

This intentionally broad awareness of how succession structures change in a diversity of settings enables the project to detect resistance to or discontent regarding the apparent naturalness of royal succession in texts (news pamphlets, plays, homiletic literature, and lyric verse) that are more amenable to popular audiences than the theories of obedience and magistracy as contained in Richard Hooker’s Laws of Ecclesiastical Policy (1594) or James Stuart’s True Lawe of Free Monarchies (1598). As I cross succession’s jurisdiction with that of the greenworld, finally, I retain the possibility of the word’s impartial connotations.

Gentlemen-shepherds and the Queen’s admirers, however, who presupposed that succession was dangerous and unpredictable, fixated on the ideal season of Spring in a effort to exempt the nation from the potentially unruly consequences of Elizabeth’s death. Although Spring’s connotations are fairly self evident, the OED reveals that an unusual amount of semantic ambiguity surrounds the word “season” which warrants
further attention. From the early fourteenth century, a “season” was known as “each of
the four equal periods – Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter – into which the year is
naturally divided.” Unhinged from the rigidity of these four divisions, the word
“season” regulates the passage of time as it pertains to human interaction with natural
phenomena. A “season” is a time of the year 1) mentioned with reference to the
weather, 2) marked by a festivity such as Christmas, 3) assigned to a particular
agricultural operation, 4) marked by a time when a plant flourishes, blooms, or bears
fruit, and 5) marked by general ripeness or maturity. As it pertained to the city, the
“season” also bracketed time periods in an institution’s year: “the term or session of a
court, university or the like.” Finally, increasing semantic ambiguity arises from the
addition of prepositional phrases, where to be “for a season” referred to an indefinite
period of time, to be “for all seasons” was to be ready for any situation or contingency
(i.e. Sir Thomas More), and to be “in season” was to do the right activity at the right time
– to be opportune or to experience the “opportune” moment. Depending on the
preposition, a “season” could connote a vague length of time or an exact, absolute
moment. Part of the seasonal lexicon’s appeal to the lyric subject, who reckoned the
passage of time according to the motions of the beloved rather than sidereal or lunar
movements, undoubtedly stems from this flexibility. Nonetheless, no single person,
despite extraordinary time management, could govern the legal, liturgical, agrarian, or
bureaucratic calendars associated with variant meanings of the word “season,” but the
state depended on the illusion that the King was not constrained by seasons: in his capacity as the body politic, a sovereign oversaw his subjects' interactions with the natural world.  

Theoretically, seasons imposed order on the chaos of sublunar mutability, and sovereignty flawlessly transcended it. Adding seasons and months, then, to an Arcadian climate in the late sixteenth century could be especially problematic. Philological excavation indicates the extensive breadth of this term’s meanings, but literary critics often narrow the seasonal lexicon’s significance to quantification: early modern literature that sustains interest in plural calendars, months, or seasons is said to reflect a georgic impulse. This shift to georgic, or to read a text “as a georgic,” results in

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6 It is worthwhile noting the unruliness of calendars before standardization. Since Elizabeth chose to refuse to acknowledge the Gregorian Reform, which was meant to standardize the day that Christendom celebrated Easter, in 1582, England was always eight full days behind nearly all of continental Europe. Secondly, the three methods of calculating time – solar (the rising and setting of the sun), lunar (the progress of the moon), and sidereal (the sun’s annual course in relation to the stars, measured by the summer and winter solstice and vernal and autumnal equinox) – to create any calendar are incommensurable. As Robert Poole writes of Easter: “It was governed by three variables (the equinox, the full moon, and the Sunday) whose relationship was so complex that it was 1876 before a mathematical formula subtle enough to describe it could be discovered. Easter is the theological equivalent of the Schleswig-Holstein question, the Gordian knot of nineteenth-century diplomacy of which it was said that all who had ever understood it had either died, gone mad or forgotten all about it.” See Robert Poole’s Time’s Alteration: Calendar Reform in Early Modern England. (London: U College of London, 1998), p. 33.

7 Paul Alpers circumvents the competition between georgic and pastoral when he argues that “in Virgil’s works, pastoral and georgic are distinct – the latter conceiving of nature as the habitation of farmers – but in the Renaissance the two types merge in various ways.” While I agree with Alpers, it is necessary to record the set of reasons why generic segregation mattered to some critics. See Alpers’s “What is Pastoral?” (Critical Inquiry (8) 1992: 437 – 460), p. 459. Alpers also breezes through the complicated differences between Theocritus and Virgil when he argues that
a sea change in fundamental critical approaches. In analyses of either aesthetic mode, the occlusion of the mutability/constancy dialectic as it pertains to seasonal change accounts for literary critics’ reluctance to develop a theory of how early modern culture charted environmental stability over time. For example, in his thorough review of the development of English pastoral, Sukanta Chaudhuri reserves his comments on months and seasons in *The Shepheardes Calender* to an appendix: “the ‘seasonal’ framework,” he admits, “does not affect my reading of the poem.”

To Chaudhuri, conventional representations of the zodiac – an ancient theme in Christian art – found in tapestries, psalters, husbandry manuals, or almanacs from the eleventh century through the Renaissance were a reminder that the agrarian labor of men and women imposes order on the year. Through spiritually redemptive labor as signaled by the months and the seasons, early modern subjects atone for the curse of Adam (Genesis 3:17) and provide sustenance for themselves by cultivating the earth. Texts that confirm the collocation of the zodiac and labor are considered a Christianized form of Virgil’s *Georgics*. In Chaudhuri’s formalist study of pastoral, textual commentary on constant change, because Virgil consciously imitates Theocritus, both texts must be classified as pastoral. In my project, when the distinction matters, I refer to a “Theocritean idyll” or to a “Theocritean impulse.”

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8 Chaudhuri, p. 450. Chaudhuri objects to literalist readings of the *Calender* that expect to learn objective information (regularities, facts, laws) about the seasons from its woodcuts. His comments obscure the real conflict, which is that criticism has not developed a format to analyze how this aspect of the environment pertains to aesthetics.
mutability, or dissolution of the earth’s constitutive elements must be segregated in an appendix on the georgic despite how these principles of natural law reflect Arcadia’s tension with monarchical succession. Chaudhuri’s decision is even more surprising given that the epilogue to the Shepheardes Calender, a textbook example of Renaissance pastoral, mysteriously claims that the calendar “shall continewe till the worlds dissolution.”

Chaudhuri’s decision to place his discussion of the georgic (rather than seasonal change) rearward is however justified by pastoral’s so-called “double longing” for innocence and happiness in a specific time when “the fertile earth as yet was free, untouched of spade or plough.”9 The institutional bifurcation between those who study pastoral and those who study georgic, however, does not imply that a close reading of nature’s course, succession, and seasonal change in Renaissance literature belongs out of all categories. Furthermore, I seek to complicate a theoretical paradigm that aligns the pastoral with the desire for constancy and the georgic with the realistic acceptance of sublunar mutability and one of its consequences: husbandry. As its focus is the relationship between the course of nature and kingship rather than genre, Seasons and Sovereigns also seeks to dispel the often harsh competition between critics of these two aesthetic forms. For example, Anthony Low argues that “the georgic lies blasted and

9 Ovid, I.115. For more on the “double longing” to surpass the corruption of modern times, see Renato Poggioli’s The Oaten Flute (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1975).
defeated by the irresistible radiance, the sun-like power, of pastoral,” before the triumphant “georgic revolution” of the seventeenth century as though the georgic is an obviously populist mode. On the other hand, the study of pastoral has accrued an intense, contentious history that inadvertently restricts its ability to be seen in a new way in academic circles, such as through the lens of natural philosophy or the naturalness of succession.

Much of pastoral’s divisive history among literary critics began with William Empson’s decision to tendentiously compare the form to proletarian literature in Some Versions of Pastoral (1935). To Empson, pastoral operates as a mode in nearly all genres where its foremost purpose is to mystify class conflict, a position that Raymond Williams reaffirms in The Country and the City (1973). Williams argues that “Arcadia” and the illusions that it represents never existed except in every generation’s firm belief that a more organic community must have preceded it. In turn, Renato Poggioli defended the form in The Oaten Flute (1975), going so far as to discredit Virgilian pastoral by writing that “all true pastoral lands are blessed with the pleasant mildness of an unchanging climate.” Paul Alpers (1982), Frederick Garber (1988), and Louis Montrose (1983) coalesce the pejorative and the positive in attempts to define all versions of pastoral, but they too frequently conclude by exposing pastoral’s complicity


\[11\] Poggioli, p. 6.
with aesthetic, enameled, and essentially untrue – thus, possibly exploitative –
descriptions of the communities that inhabit rural landscapes. For example, Louis
Montrose notes how the “vast majority of Elizabethan pastoral texts...banish the
ploughman,” when, according to historical evidence, agriculture and sheepraising were
more likely to exist in a “symbiotic relationship” with one another or to compete for
land resources.\(^\text{12}\) Even Montrose does not restrain from identifying pastoral’s
fundamental untruths in the fashion of a scandalous exposé.

In the second chapter, “Succession and the Sea,” I address Montrose’s position
toward pastoral’s fundamental untruths by examining texts that flood Arcadian spaces.
In stark contrast to pastoral’s Golden Age, visions of the epic-scale dissolution of
civilization by a deluge and the subsequent regeneration of life decenter the humanist
subject, focusing instead on the volatility of natural spaces and geographies. In flood
narratives, an important yet routinely neglected counterbalance to pastoral utopias, man
is not an autonomous and privileged superior who stands aloof from the environment to

\[^{12}\text{Louis Adrian Montrose “Of Gentlemen and Shepherds” (ELH (50) 1983: 415 – 459), p. 424.}
Montrose opens his study of pastoral by warning that “modern theories of pastoral have a way of
turning into theories of literature.” To Montrose, literary critics (Empson, Poggiolo, Burke) err
when they define the form too broadly. Kenneth Burke, for example, claims that any text is
pastoral if it aims at a “stylistic transcending of conflict” in symbols of communion. Montrose
does a little of the broad and the narrow (as this study seeks to do) but he eventually embraces
this understanding of pastoral from the 1550’s – 1630: pastoral “is ubiquitous not only in
established literary and pictorial genres but also in religious, political, and didactic texts and in
the figurative discourse of letters, speeches, and recorded conversation. What all these texts have
in common...is a nexus of conventional persons, places, animals, objects, activities, and
relations.” See Montrose, p. 420.
pursue *otium* or write pastoral lyric. Appallingly, in a deluge the subject and the entirety of his civilization’s knowledges dissolve in a surge of water and disappear from historical record. The humanist and his books are drowned, but so are the monarch and his subjects. Libraries, repositories of accumulated wisdom, are buried in oblivion. This chapter juxtaposes two theatrical works with a centerpiece of mannerist gardening, the sea grotto, brought about by hydraulic technology. Bernardino Buontalenti’s *grotta grande* (1583) at the Medici’s Boboli Garden and John Lyly’s *Gallathea* (1583) both appropriate legendary stories of deluge from Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Critias* in order to explore the titanic struggle between memory and erasure of entire civilizations. Boboli’s sea grotto and Lyly’s Lincolnshire setting simulate water’s (de)generative power and fully exploit early modern fascination with alchemical mixing of unlike kinds (elements). In Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1610), the mountain and the cavern in Wales evoke the memory of Deucalion and Pyrrha through the enormous Mt. Parnassus grotto (1609) recently erected at Queen Anne’s Somerset House garden; both preserve the elect but act as equivocal reminders of destruction and survival. In each text in chapter 2, a space is reserved where art is never greater than nature.

In the third chapter, “In the Wake of the Golden Age,” I explore the reasons behind Thomas Dekker’s temporary use of pastoral themes to describe the “protean climactericall” year or “earthquake” in regnal temporality – 1603 – and Elizabeth’s funeral, or “wake.” Unconvinced that the Golden Age was the appropriate analogy for
the new King’s reign, Dekker ameliorates the excitement of cataclysmic signs and of sublunar vicissitude in the body politic by locating political forecasts in occult signatures. I argue that Shakespeare’s Macbeth functions similarly, as it too addresses the mystery of Duncan’s regicide (he was a “guest of summer”) and Malcolm’s succession with a theater of environmental wonders (such as “unfixing the earthbound root” of Birnam Wood or greeting the “supernatural intelligencers” on the blasted heath) rather than the power of eternal Spring and its enduring rituals. In Macbeth, the “primrose path,” a vestige of the “gather ye roses” pastoral refrain from the 1590’s, leads to regicide and an everlasting bonfire, while Macduff’s knowledge of seasonal decorum ensures constancy and patrilineal succession. Chapter 3 distinguishes between two staged encounters with the natural world at opposite extremes – pastoral, which leads to poesis and wonder, which may lead to scientia – in an effort to explain why Shakespearean tragedy requires a more open dialogue with contemporary developments in natural philosophy. The chapter concludes by arguing that the spectacle of outdoor theater displaces belief in pastoral in The Winter’s Tale (1611), a text that signals an end of one feasible reaction to succession crises in the greenworld.

Chapter 4, “Odd Feeders:” Female Inconstancy and Contract Dissolution, shifts the Arcadian virtue of constancy inward, testing its validity as a prescriptive element of early modern constructions of selfhood. Recognizing that early Stuart dramas of contract rigorously examine the pandemic of female inconstancy, Chapter 4
contextualizes this accusation with homiletic literature before analyzing how it pertains to Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s play, *The Changeling* (1621). I then contrast nature’s impulse for homonormativity as seen in Elizabethan festive comedy with John Donne’s depiction of a libertine cosmos in his third elegy, “Change,” suggesting that both are operative in dramas of contract. Greenworld and sexual change breed celestial harmony according to Donne’s speaker, who argues that constancy is a form of captivity that alienates men and women with Galenic bodies from a natural world that teems with change. However, Middleton and Rowley bypass both courses of nature by introducing “odd feeders,” or “nature’s frequent frailty,” as a third approach to human relationships, where nature’s perverted course matches absolutely unlike kinds.

In a sweeping departure from the determinist arguments of the Elizabethan marriage homily or *The Changeling*, which assume that women are born with a poverty of reason and an excess of passion, Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania* (1621) introduces women who reason and who profess judgment on men. The project’s final chapter, *Skepticism in the Greenworld*, concludes with a close reading Mary Wroth’s two female interlocutors, Pamphilia and Urania, who debate the value and the naturalness of female constancy. As she reassesses its ideological framework, Wroth creates a robust argument in favor of learning to unlearn the constancy that composes Pamphilia’s breast, a “Sanctuary of zealous affection.”
2. Succession and the Sea:

On April 17, 1607 the townspeople of Warwickshire returned from church to discover that a “most strange and wonderfull floode, such a one as no age, memory or record hath euer knowne,” had damaged their property and homes.¹ In response, as the anonymous author of *A true Relation of the great Floods* writes, the residents of Warwickshire began to repent for their spiritual transgressions. Yet after only nine days passed, the “remembrance of the wonder” faded and men chose rather to seek a “naturall cause” for the flood.² This is a regrettable decision, the anonymous author

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² *Miracle*, p. 5 – 6.
piously concludes, for “strange, unreasonable and unnaturall” events are testimonies of “Gods great power” and are only adequately resolved through spiritual labor.

In its wondrous weather reports, England’s popular press alternated between value-neutral observation and “true relations” of miraculous deeds without hesitation. As they pertain to a providential frame of reference, supernatural events actually strengthened claims for textual veracity since many people believed that the inorganic elements inhabited the same moral universe as men and beasts and were similarly guided by a divine power. Thus stone, sky, and water were ruled by and replete with spiritual significance. Even so, Alexandra Walsham has argued that a providential framework for causality in early modernity was not “static or impermeable to wider intellectual and epistemological developments.”

As I will argue, in some cases poets and artists sincerely tried to reconcile accepted tenets of natural philosophy with historical or current flood narratives by producing archaeological evidence of radically inconstant environments. These aesthetic reproductions of nature’s destructive power have yet to be fully integrated into the increasing amount of scholarship on literary greenworlds, an omission that the following chapter seeks to remedy.


As a disorder of nature, a flooded space fails the tests of temperance and constancy and would seem to have no place in a festive comedy or a pastoral landscape, the traditional domains of Renaissance literary greenworlds or garden architecture. Yet these domains are precisely where floods appear: Bernardino Buontalenti’s *grotta grande* (1583) at the Italian Boboli gardens, John Lyly’s *Gallathea* (1583) and William Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1610) each appropriate legendary stories of deluge from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Critias* in order to document the titanic struggle between the memory and the erasure of complete civilizations.\(^5\) By analyzing a physical space as evidently non-textual as a sea grotto next to a work of the theater, this chapter argues for the fluidity of Renaissance thought across modern disciplinary divides.

In addition to foregrounding radical instability, the specter of antediluvian worlds within pastoral comedies dedicated to sovereigns (the Medicis and Queen Elizabeth) reframes the dilemma of monarchical succession on an epic scale: the

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\(^5\) It is uncertain exactly when Lyly wrote *Gallathea*, though the comedy was performed at Elizabeth’s court on January 1, 1588, and published in 1592. According to one editor, Anne Begor Lancashire, the play was written “no later than early 1585 and no earlier than 1583.” Lyly, John. *Gallathea and Midas*. (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1969), p. xiv.
transitional moments between complete civilizations, territories of earth, and libraries of knowledge. The *Timaeus’s* insistence that there were multiple universal floods is particularly frightening since this assertion opposes the beginning of the Second Book of Peter (3:5-7), where God promises Noah that he will never destroy the world by water again. If the *Timaeus* was correct, races and civilizations were seasonal (that is, cyclical and recurring) and vulnerable, hence temporary. Furthermore, flood season(s) and diluvial ecology haunted the Renaissance imaginary because of their unique ability to dissolve the boundaries between embodied subjects and natural spaces. Treatment of dissolving boundaries on a macrocosmic level intersects with what Julian Yates calls embodiment theory’s recent “undeniable critical gain” in foregrounding the flexible borderlines between subjects and objects. Embodiment theory suggests that selfhood (including the particular case of the sovereign self) was experienced through staged transactions and alliances with environments. If early moderns were subject to their bodies in unique ways, they were also the subjects of natural spaces and physical elements that deserve to be as rigorously historicized as the corporeal body, as quite often what is “natural” about the natural world is surprisingly and provocatively subject to local, cultural influences. One benefit of investigating the “natural” or the “normal” as it pertains to sudden dissolution, long periods of stability, or gradual decay in early modern ecology is that it directs our attention to the reciprocity between nature and

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6 Yates, p. 188.
culture. It also directs our attention to how writers and artists distort, violate, or embrace principal natural law(s) to voice an opinion regarding the body politic, such as the legitimacy of a monarch, the naturalness of royal succession, or the viability of contracts in relationships between unequal partners – three areas of social justice of critical interest to this study.

For example, for Renaissance thinkers to understand how “the great globe itself” dissolves requires that they replace nature’s bias (its impulse to attract like kinds) with its lethal heterogeneity. Because tales of epic-scale loss through deluge and the subsequent regeneration of life decenter the humanist subject and replace the reigning government of tranquil space with proof of its harsh volatility, flood narratives put pressure also on the integrity of the body politic and lineal succession. By doing so, they imagine a way to level all social distinctions in what Jody Mikalachki identifies as “watery images of loss and destruction…obscurity and fragmentation.” When the globe dissolves, sovereigns are not autonomous superiors who stand aloof from plants, beasts and elements to contemplate philosophy, pursue otium or at the very least guarantee lineal succession. Appallingly, in a deluge the sovereign and the entirety of a

7 Shakespeare, William, The Tempest, (IV.i.153, 154). In The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller, eds. (New York: Penguin, 2002). All subsequent references to Shakespeare’s works are to this edition and are cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

civilization’s knowledge transpire in a surge of water and disappear from historical record. The resultant historiographical anxiety that this chapter is partly concerned with in its discussions of inconstancy stems also from one of the most widely-quoted passages from Ovid in the Renaissance: Pythagoras’s apocalyptic speech from the last book of the Metamorphoses. In Book XV, as Pythagoras describes the paradox of constant change, he cites dramatic evidence of at least one terrible flood:

For I have seen it sea which was substantiall ground alate
Agethe where sea was, I have seene the same become dry lond,
And shelles and scales of Seafish farre have lyen from any strond,
And in the toppes of mountaynes hygh old Anchors have been found.\(^9\)

The geographic reversals signified by flooded land and dry seas show how the earth’s constitutive elements “move well beyond the boundaries of a backdrop or setting” to become the central actor(s) in world history.\(^10\) As the historian Fernand Braudel observes, climate constancy or stability was the most important contributing factor to any harvest’s quality, as early modern Europe’s “insistent background music.”\(^11\) Braudel goes on to observe how inconstancy had significant consequence: drought, famine and crop blight led to the fluctuation of grain prices and demographic shifts in nations. “We should bear in mind the congenital frailty of man,” as Braudel

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argues, “compared to the colossal forces of nature.”

Renaissance texts that emphasize nature’s dangerous predisposition for volatility rather than its stability with past or future flood tales develop strategic uses of uncertainty, such as reorganizing the body politic to prevent or make insoluble its dissolving, leaky contours.

2.1 Deluge in Florence, 1583

Plato’s *Timaeus*, the first Greek account of a divine creation, opens with the offer to retell an old tale: the lost world of Atlantis and the prehistoric Athenians, who lived and waged war 9,000 years ago. Critias, one of four interlocutors, recalls a story that his grandfather told him as a child. His grandfather (also named Critias) heard the story from Solon, a wise Athenian statesman whose first hand account originated in a discussion with an Egyptian priest in the city of Sais. Solon brought the story back to Athens to publish it, but he became preoccupied with civic obligations, including class uprisings, and abandoned the enterprise. This story, the history of the unrecorded achievements of an ancient race of Athenians, is Critias’s proposed response to Socrates’s question from the previous day’s dialogue, “Will my ideal state work?”

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12 Braudel, p. 50.

13 According to Desmond Lee, this “ideal state” does not refer to the *Republic* for two reasons: 1) the *Timaeus* and *Republic* take place on festivals that are two months apart and 2) the *Timaeus* was
However, the tale of the antediluvian state, preserved by the Egyptian priest, has an uncanny way of dissolving before print; significantly, multiple interruptions prevent Plato or Critias’s retelling. In what seems to be an unnecessary detour, Critias waits until Timaeus delivers his account of the origin of the universe and its structure.

Among the many rational explanations of natural processes that follow, Timaeus speaks for over one hundred pages on subjects related to Greek sciences (mathematics, the human soul, psychology, sense perception and botany) and then abruptly ends the dialogue. In the *Critias* (typically published with the *Timaeus*), the Atlantis legend is picked up at the start of the following day. This time, Critias describes some aspects of the lost civilizations, but before he can discuss the epic battle, the natural deluge that swallows Atlantis or the earthquake that destroys the Athenians, the dialogue abruptly ends again. This puzzling lacunae allows the Greeks to continue to do what the Egyptian priest of the *Timaeus* berates Solon for doing in the first place: misplacing historical record and refusing to know themselves. Because they refuse to preserve a written record, they are destined to start *ad infinitum*, as ignorant children “unlettered and uncultured:”

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You [Greeks] remember only one deluge, though there have been many, and you do not know that the finest and best race of men that ever existed lived in your country; you and your fellow citizens are descended from the few survivors that remained, but you know nothing about it because so many succeeding generations left no record in writing.\textsuperscript{14}

The only Greek survivors of the three deluges before Deucalion mentioned in the \textit{Critias} are members of a primitive “unlettered mountain race” who “knew nothing of the virtues and institutions of their predecessors” who lived in the cities and valleys.\textsuperscript{15} Dispersed survivors constitute the unlettered mountain race that manages to live, but that cannot secure recorded history.

For modern readers, as Walter Stephens observes, Plato’s fragmented tale of Atlantis is regarded as a myth, but in the Renaissance, “erudite and serious-minded scholars accepted it as a reminiscence of factual history, gathered by Plato during his own pilgrimage to Egypt.”\textsuperscript{16} Plato’s dialogue on Atlantis introduces two particularly disturbing facts for early modern thought as it pertains to humanist education: first, according to Plato, each succeeding generation of Athenians degenerates from an ideal, yet erased civilization, and secondly, epic-scale succession always depends on a descent from primitive mountain dwellers, who ironically turn out to be the ancestors of current Athenians. Rather than move forward, Solon, Critias and the other interlocutors who

\textsuperscript{14} Plato, \textit{Timaeus}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{15} Plato, \textit{Critias}, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{16} Stephens, Walter. “\textit{Livres de hailte gresse}: Bibliographic Myth from Rabelais to Du Bartas.” \textit{MLN} (120) 2005: 60 – 83, p. 64.
invest their time to develop Athenian statecraft or Greek science simply recover lost epistemic territory in the ongoing struggle between *memoria literarum* and the forces of *obliteratio*. Frustratingly, Plato’s story posits an irretrievable, non-fragmented repository of culture illustrative of Athens’s highest political and social achievements, only to refuse to document this particular epistemic tradition. Plato’s central moral is secular, but in Ovid’s narrative, Deucalion and Pyrrha survive based on their virtue, thus teaching piety. Whether they propose piety or history, deluge narratives are as fragmented and inconclusive as the events that they describe.

However, the interrupted narrative of Atlantis cements the vital connection between the quest to perpetuate the ideal state and the historically contingent and often murky logistics of royal succession in Renaissance political theory. Shakespeare alludes to this nexus of deluge, crisis and succession in *The Winter’s Tale* (1610) when Polixenes, in a fit of rage, curses his son as far from lineal succession as Deucalion: “we’ll bar thee from succession, // not hold thee of our blood – no, not our kin – // farre than Deucalion off” (IV.iv.428 – 430). Polixenes jumps chaotically from disinheriting his son Florizel from biological succession to imagining that Florizel is his predecessor – his “kin” or the first common ancestor of all men who survived the flood. In his desperate effort to keep the family’s bloodline pure, Polixenes equates his son’s *impar coniugium* (“unequal union”) or mixed marriage to a mere shepherdess, Perdita, with the brink of
antediluvian rupture. In *The Winter’s Tale*, a flood narrative magnifies one family’s crisis of succession to that of the entire body politic. Thus the Renaissance inherited and modified tales of epic-scale dissolution that shared several key themes: 1) current societies degenerated from a superior, antediluvian Golden Age, 2) there are inescapable seasons of floods, and 3) nonetheless, each civilization tries to transcend or impose order on unlettered successor-survivors and transmit their knowledge and culture.

Each of these factors made classical accounts of deluge a convenient resource for a discussion of royal succession and its periodically contested biological, legal and divine rationales in the late sixteenth century. In northern Italy, the case of the Medici family, who ruled as despots throughout the Mediterranean, was no exception. When Cosimo I de’ Medici came to power in 1537, he planted a new garden in the valley of Boboli hill and built a fort, Belvedere, on its summit. Like other royal gardens, Boboli expressed political territoriality by signifying Cosimo’s ability to regulate or impose order on seasonal change in the natural world. As sovereigns, the ultimate stewards of the garden, regulated the environment, governed resource distribution, and managed heterogenous elements of earth – plants and minerals included – in the effort to create harmonious concord, he or she reinforced their capacity to govern the state.

Furthermore, naturalizing a sovereign’s power ideally convinces the realm that this

\[\text{17 For an analysis of this emblem, see Laurie Shannon’s “Nature’s Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness.” (Modern Philology (98) 2000: 183 – 210).}\]
power is not accidental, subject to temporality (existing inside history), or in any sense constructed. As artificially staged natural spaces, gardens underscore the divine right of kings and evidence the ambition and magnificent scope of nascent absolutist monarchies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus it is spectacularly unusual, even counterintuitive, that a sovereign would want to draw attention to water’s destructive power and the formidable, hazy contours of a state’s dissolution and succession between ages, or even the simple hardships of natural disaster.

Nonetheless, to this day, as in the mid-sixteenth century, if a visitor enters Florence’s Boboli gardens at the Palazzo Pitti’s northeast side, the first thing that he or she encounters is not a cultivated, orderly green space. It is Bernardo Buontalenti’s (1536 – 1608) grotta grande, and though it has little to do with growth – through winter, spring, summer or fall – it does bring into physical form the antediluvian ecology found in Hellenistic flood narratives. The sea grotto materializes past and future global dissolution by capturing the death of a technologically advanced civilization and a new, primitive beginning. This particular sea grotto, in the form of a classical nymphaeum, is a

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temple encrusted with stalactites, seashells, pumice and coral with formal rectangle rooms that terminate in an apse. In the midst of the grotto’s façade stand two columns of red stone from Monterantoli with white marble capitals and bases. The exterior features the favorite device of Cosimo I de’ Medici (the tortoise and the sail), ornate shellwork and sculptures of Apollo and Ceres, by Baccio Bandinelli, located in two niches. (See Figure 1). Begun in August of 1583, and filled with unexpected fountains and rippling water effects, the grotto’s mastery of hydraulic technology tells a narrative that combines elements from two of Grand Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici’s (1519 – 1574) lifetime civic achievements: the aqueducts that brought water to Florence, also celebrated by his Neptune Fountain in the Piazza della Signoria and the resplendent architectural complex that included his ducal residence at Pitti and its garden, Boboli. But the grotto essentially expresses the Neoplatonic interests of Cosimo’s son, Francesco I (1541 – 1587), who previously commissioned Buontalenti in projects at the Villa Medici Pratolino, sixteen miles outside of the city.19 With the aid of Buontalenti, Francesco tried to prove that his family line mastered flood seasons and, as a consequence, the forces of obliteratio.

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Inside the first room of Boboli’s triple *grotta grande*, frescoes, marble sculptures and mortar bas reliefs depict a pastoral scene that literally melts in and out of the wall. This effect is achieved through uneven surface texture, varied media and the circular shape of the room’s vault. For example, on the left side of the grotto’s first room a three-dimensional shepherd plays the pipes as he tends several sheep; another man watches his barking dog. (See Figure 2). These figures, including a giant tree, are the creations of Piero de’ Tommaso Mati, who built them from mortar, *spugne* (a sponge-like material), and the stalactites of the local hills in Valdimarina, and they appear to emerge from the wall. They are imperceptible at first glance. Behind these life-sized sheep, nymphs, and shepherds of the bas relief are the pastoral frescoes of Bernardino Poccetti. The frescoes
depict idyllic landscapes and pastoral scenes—trees, cliffs, rocks, quarrymen and shepherds—far in the distance. But the most important fact remains that when the sea grotto was first built, water ran through thin tubes down the walls to illuminate the sea stones, shells and frescoes. It sprang out of hidden jets in the floor to douse visitors unexpectedly and filled the troughs on either side of the room. The height of a center jet could even be adjusted to reach the ceiling. At the oculus (the empty space at the ceiling’s center), Buontalenti suspended a crystal fish tan so that sunlight entered the grotto and was refracted by water, glass, and the fish’s movement, giving the entire space an underwater, yet incandescent effect.

Figure 2: *stalactite sheep, Boboli, 6/30/2008*
In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when a visitor entered the enclosed space he or she would feel immersed in water, or imagine herself a victim of a titanic flood that would soon drown the unsuspecting figures in the frescos and bas relief. Francesco Bocchi, in his 1591 Florentine guidebook, claims that Michelangelo’s figures try to escape from the crushing marble and “flee the ruin around them.” Because commentary by art and garden historians effaces the somatic experiences of those who entered the original grotto, *grotta grande* is frequently misrepresented as a space of respite. For example, to Claudia Lazzaro the grotto’s stalactite figures, including those of the bas relief, recline with Arcadian serenity: “a nude, sleeping nymph in a pose of complete abandon…slumbers to the sounds of the mountain spring above her.” Lazzaro finds the reclining figures and mountaineers “oblivious to the condition of the vault.” But the conditions of the vault have changed: now, the sea grotto is completely dry, and it has been since 1754. This explains Bocchi’s report that people struggled to exit or that they imagined that Michelangelo’s slaves were doing the same. The fully functioning grotto refused to resolve nature’s “warring elements” into unqualified

20 Lazzaro, p. 206.

21 Lazzaro, p. 205.

22 Gurrieri, p. 39. The anonymous author of *A Tour in France and Italy, made by an English Gentleman* (1675) visited the grotto at Villa Aldobrandini (Frascati) and wrote that when the water was set in motion, a facsimile storm “imitated Rain, Hail, Snow and Thunder, which may be heard for miles” (qtd. in Hunt p. 45). John Dixon Hunt. *Garden and Grove.* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1986).
pastoral bliss; the serenity of the Arcadian figures in the bas relief was unbalanced by a threat of destruction – not to the stalactite sculptures, but to the sentient guests of the Medici’s court who did not necessarily volunteer to suffer this sea-change.

Figure 3: Right wall of the first room, Boboli, 6/30/2008

If Boboli’s theme as an entire garden was a “celebration of the water that Cosimo brought to Florence,” as Lazzaro argues, then the sea grotto was also a conflicted reminder that water could generate and destroy.23 Even though the hidden jets were powerful technological achievements, they ironically enacted rainwater’s troubling unpredictability or the climate inconstancy that Braudel, and the Medicis, knew affected

23 Lazzaro, p. 201.
the price of grain and the stability of the ducal territory. For example, in 1558 the river Arno’s heavy flooding caused destruction in Florence. Parts of the city were under twenty-two feet of water and only one bridge, Ponte Vecchio, survived. “It was after this flood,” as G.F. Young observes, “that Cosimo built his two fine bridges to replace the two which had been destroyed.” It was the sovereign’s ability to impose order on water through restraint and release that mattered most for the body politic. Unlike the Arno, the sea grotto was an enclosed vault and, though paradoxically dynamic and static, it was under dazzlingly complete control. It reflected the profound belief that a force (either a King or divine providence) guided the inconstancy of the four elements in addition to the reassuring constancy of the seasonal calendar. More so than the Neptune Fountain or the Arno’s bridges, the sea grotto was a bold public expression that water worked for the Grand Duke, who, as an interventionist deity reigned over the hydraulic system of a vault that signified epic-scale dissolution and the struggle for survival. It was less clear how the Florentine court, or any victim of the Grand Duke’s sudden shower, with its invasive erotic and humoral connotations, would feel as they were soaked with water. Their lesson was to obey and passively yield “as fits [their] nature,” when what “nature” was amounted to an assuredly complicated and physically discomforting expression of secular power. Considered in this light, the rainmaker and his dousing game had a sinister aspect, for the garden’s owner was free to tyrannically

24 Young, p. 577.
manipulate the physical constitution of his subjects’ bodies while remaining intact and insoluble himself.

This engineered sense of complete competence was an extraordinary departure from other Renaissance accounts of the powerlessness that sovereigns felt in the outdoors. King Lear rails against the storm on the heath and observes how those in poverty must “bide the pelting of this pitiless storm” without defense from “seasons such as these” (III.iv.29, 32). Shakespeare frequently uses the occasion of an unruly (as in, impossible to be ruled) sky to remind monarchs of their mortality. For this reason, As You Like It’s Duke Senior relishes the pain of seasonal change in Arden’s forest, for it ironically makes him feel more alive. In an inverse of the monarch’s complete control in the sea grotto, the shipwrecked Pericles (another king who struggles against his limitations) says to heaven: “wind, rain, and thunder, remember earthly man // is but a substance that must yield to you; // and I, as fits my nature, do obey you” (II.i.2 – 4). If water worked for the Grand Duke who guided its regimented course and timed release through grotta grande, Boboli, and all of Tuscany, then he would belong in a different category then an “earthly man” like Pericles. By staging his power to impose order on the mixture of unkind, inorganic elements and the seismic ruptures in world history caused by universal floods, the owner of the sea grotto opposes the danger of obliteratio
with his presumably unmixed body. Boboli reinforces a hierarchy absent in classical accounts of deluge, where sovereigns drown along with subjects. By doing so, the sea grotto positions the sovereign against or above nature’s seasons, as the duke refuses to be “but a substance that must yield” to the earth’s constitutive elements.

As a result of this vital separation, an ambivalence completely absent at the Neptune Fountain, where the reigning Medici is allegorized as the sea god and still therefore part of the natural world, presides over the sea grotto. If epic-scale dissolution signals the potential devastation inherent in cyclical crises of political succession, then to survive flood seasons is to advocate self-constancy, distance and simply staying above water—unmixed and insoluble, but without succession. As a principle, separation through self-constancy protects, whether it protects those who, like the Duke, control the grotto’s hydraulic technology or those who dwell in mountains and survive the perennial assaults of water. Of course, lineal succession in the body politic requires heterosexual coupling and its attendant mixing of unlike kinds. Because a mixture dilutes and alters its constitutive elements, it was thought to pose practical risks for the integrity of bodies, families and gender arrangements that comprised the early modern

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25 “Every subject grew up,” as Gail Kern Paster argues, “with a common understanding of his or her body as a semipermeable, irrigated container in which humors moved sluggishly.” Paster distinguishes between a prior mode of Renaissance thought whereby subjects lived in a holistic relationship to their environments and, on the other hand, a sense of “bodily refinement and self-mastery” ascertained through detachment from this environment. See The Body Embarrassed. (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993), pp. 7–13.
social fabric. As Laurie Shannon observes, this point is acknowledged in the case of
gender “whether we consider the symbolic convergence of chastity with power in the
female case or the now-established critical viewpoint that effeminacy marks men who
become womanly by too strong an interest in women.” 26 In early modernity, mixture
was thus understood as an intellectual problem in natural philosophy and as a sexual
problem with vital connections to lineal succession and the perpetuation of the ideal
state, both of which are at stake in flood narratives. As Margreta de Grazia observes of
Shakespeare’s Dark Lady sonnets, “nothing threatens a patriarchal and hierarchic social
formation more than a promiscuous womb.” 27 The sea grotto activates latent
Renaissance fear of a woman’s power to adulterate bloodlines unbeknownst to men.
The sum of these considerations and anxieties over ante/post diluvian ecologies was
expressed in the emblematically rich organization of natural space in royal gardens and
sea grottos, where the reigning Medici choreographed water in its ceaseless vicissitude
through fountains, troughs, and jets. 28

As a placeholder for Arcadia’s vulnerability, the sea grotto and its stalactite
sheep rid a pastoral landscape (and, by extension, a literary greenworld) of its illusions

26 Shannon, p. 185.

27 de Grazia, Margreta. “The Scandal of Shakespeare’s Sonnets.” In Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Critical

28 Sea grottos and fountains also feature prominently at Medici estates such as Tivoli (outside
Rome) and Pratolino, about twenty miles from Boboli.
that it transcends time. Storms and the destruction that they cause represent an integral part of nature whose power over elements and alchemy inevitably challenges individual human life and the sum of a civilization’s knowledge. By reserving a space where art is never greater than nature, the Medici’s limit epistemology’s domain and forbid literacy or science from succeeding, postdiluvian generations in an apocalyptic landscape. As a cautionary tale, the sea grotto’s Faustian moral condones the naturalness of not knowing nature’s core secrets and encourages the mystery of nature’s processes. Yet, as mentioned above, the moral is undercut by the Duke’s survival and the fact that artisans operate the hydraulic machines. Within these competing claims, the sea grotto illustrates the paradox of succession by illustrating the paradoxes of sovereignty.

2.2 “It is but a liquid element:” Gallathea in Neptune’s Park

Dangers of the leak-prone body politic are also at stake in John Lyly’s Gallathea (1583). As the play begins, Tityrus and his daughter, Gallathea, appear to relax beneath a fair oak on a broad plain, but in reality they are devising a plan to escape Neptune’s wrath and threat of deluge. Thus rather than cue the audience to bucolic leisure, Lyly summons an intensity of life unknown to the reigning pastoral mood (simplicity, tranquility, and repose): Gallathea’s setting is an Elizabethan tidal plain (Lincolnshire) at the brink of complete devastation. In this way, the dramatic effect of deluge is similar to
that of the Italian sea grotto, which Francesco I de’ Medici built on the fringes of Boboli’s pastoral spaces during the same decade that Lyly wrote his play. Despite its eventual comedic resolution, Lyly implies that Elizabethans risk repeating the mistakes of the original Atlantides, who according to the Critias, “were governed by the injunctions of Poseidon, enshrined in the law and engraved by the first kings on an orichalc pillar in the temple of Poseidon in the middle of the island.” Over time, when Atlantis’s citizens disobeyed this law and invaded Athens, the sea swallowed them in a single day.

In Lyly’s play, Danish invaders (who signal a crypto-Catholic threat) conquer the English and institute new, decadent customs. The resultant Anglo-Danish population violates Neptune’s temple and is immediately punished with a monstrous deluge: as Tityrus remembers, “the god who binds the winds in the hollows of the earth…caused the seas to break their bounds, sith men had broke[n] their vows, and to swell as far above their reach as men had swerved beyond their reason” (I.1.25 – 28). After the flood disperses, Neptune requires that the Anglo-Dutch community atone for their betrayal by sacrificing the “fairest and chastest virgin in all the country” to the sea monster, Agar, every five years (43). Tityrus describes this sacrifice, brutal and horrific, as aberrant to nature: “the waters roar, the fowls fly away, and the cattle in the field for terror shun the banks” when the sea monster emerges from the ocean (49 – 50).


29 Plato, Critias, p. 143. “Orichalc” is a valuable antediluvian “metal” invented by Plato.
Gallathea’s aptness for comic likenesses—nature’s homonormativity or its tendency to celebrate convergences or attraction between similar kinds—secures the pastoral community from Neptune’s wrath rather than providential intervention. Lyly thus significantly diverges from Ovidian and biblical patterns of divine wrath, punishment, and rebirth. For one, Lyly’s shepherds disobey Neptune when each of the fairest girls (Gallathea and Phyllida) disguises themselves as young men, flee into the woods, and fall in love. Neptune is furious with this deception, and his incursion into Lincolnshire (technically, the realm of Diana and Venus) signifies his single-minded pursuit of justice against a community that twice breaks their covenant. In Lyly’s story, conventional piety involves appeasing a deity who demands a contra naturam sacrifice that the play’s heroes ignore. If no one practices piety, it cannot be said to redeem the community. Thus recourse to providentialism fails as a substantive interpretive analytic in Gallathea.

Openly critical of the sea god, Lyly suggests that Neptune becomes tyrannical when his course exceeds its bounds: “I will into these woods,” Neptune warns, “and mark all, and in the end will mar all” (II.ii.26 – 27). This course or trespass through the woods to “mark” (spy on) or “mar” (harm) unspotted nature signifies a leak or breach and undermines the authority Neptune assumes to hunt Diana’s virgins in the forest. Clearly, Neptune’s park is the sea, not the greenworld. Furthermore, if his threat to destroy the pastoral landscape once again is serious, we immediately realize that his
unlimited power to devastate the entire island and transform it into a water “park” creates an argument for obedience and submission, even at the cost of a sacrificial virgin every five years. “Dear is the peace,” Gallathea concludes when she hears of the shepherds’ customary tribute, “that is bought with guiltless blood” (I.i.49). In an antagonistic relationship with the greenworld, the god of the sea strays from nature’s course.

In piety’s absence, however, Lyly hints that nature’s homonormativity defuses the flood crisis. For example, the cataclysmic rupture between the antediluvian world and Tityrus’s community is not complete. A strangely nurturing seascape replaces the destructive dissolution of the *Timaeus*, Book I of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, or the experiences of the uninformed guests of the sea grotto at Boboli: curiously, humankind appears to flourish during the deluge. As the storm advances, as Tityrus recalls, “might you see ships sail where sheep fed, anchors cast where ploughs go, fishermen throw their nets where husbandmen sow their corn, and fishes throw their scales where fowls do breed their quills” (I.i.28 – 32). Tityrus’s antediluvian community survives by replacing a land economy with a sea economy (ships/sheep, anchors/ploughs, fisherman/husbandman, cast nets/sow corn, fish/fowl, scales/quills), though gathering “froth” rather than “dew” and “rotten weeds” rather than “sweet roses” reinforces a hierarchy among the otherwise value neutral binary sets. The prospect of land/water mixture required by floods is driven by nature’s aptitude for wonder more than for
violence. At the core of these homologies lies the discovery that every underwater entity has a recognizable terrestrial correlate, or twin. Driven by similitude, resemblance and likeness, Lyly thoroughly orders his vision of global dissolution. Tityrus’s only alarming pair, “passing fair maids” and “monstrous mermaids,” simply signals the absence of sexual mixing at sea (mermaids were unsusceptible to penetration) and prefigures the innocence of his daughter’s potential sex change that Venus gestures toward in the play’s conclusion (I.i.33 – 34). As the Mariner says in the comic subplot, “I fear the sea no more than a dish of water. Why, fools, it is but a liquid element” (I.iv.35 – 36).

Moreover, it is Gallathea and Phyllida’s unbounded flood of affection, what Laurie Shannon calls the play’s desire to promote “bonds ‘within kind’ above cross-gender erotic mixing,” that ultimately secures the sea and the land’s final separation. When the two girls first meet while disguised as men, Phyllida registers her effort to counterfeit masculinity in an aside on crossing kinds:

> It is a pretty boy and a fair. He might well have been a woman; but because he is not, I am glad I am, for now under the color of my coat I shall decipher the follies of their kind. (II.i.19 – 22)

Yet the difference of kind that Phyllida seeks to imitate and hopes to untangle leads her back to sameness. By the next act, her observations and interactions with Gallathea have forced her to conclude that the “pretty boy” is simply the same: “I fear me he is as I

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am,” Phyllida says, “a maiden” (III.ii.29 – 30). The comic recognition fostered by resemblance allows the two girls to retreat into the grove, or greenworld, to suggestively “make much one of another” (55). After Neptune adjudicates the subplot’s chaos caused by Diana’s nymphs and Cupid’s arrows, he ceases to sacrifice virgins, but it is Venus who claims to transform one of the two girls into a man – a husband – after they have already enacted a civil marriage ceremony with public declarations of constant love. If Polixenes’s allusion to Deucalion suggests that an early modern *impar coniugium* generates the chaos of a deluge succession crisis, then Lyly’s absolutely equal union guarantees safe succession through its ability to instance the “philosophical preference for likeness.”

In fact, upon mention of his daughter’s sexual “changing,” Tityrus wishes that Venus would change his wife into a man “because she loves always to play with men” (V.iii.162). This wary cuckoldry joke on the eve of a marriage questions the feasibility of merging men and women (rather than women and women) in binding erotic contracts as it simultaneously acknowledges the old paradox that succession relies on heterosexual coupling. By offering this joke, Lyly recalls widespread dismay regarding the proposed match between Elizabeth and d’Alençon in 1580 and implies that royal nuptials, however momentous, carry the potential for their own negation with fresh, offstage crises that belie the confident, heteromarital resolutions of Renaissance comedy.

31 Shannon, p. 191.
Tityrus’s sudden anxiety over his absent wife’s fidelity further implicates the naturalness of heterosexual coupling as seen in marital bonds: in a marriage without trust, every day becomes diluvian. That is, every day is an unstable commixture on the brink of dissolution rather than a compact and insoluble bond. Succession occurs within marriage’s socially approved confines, but as Titryus’s uneasy cuckoldry joke suggests, the feeling is one of perpetually waiting for another flood to make illegitimate one’s own progeny.

In Gallathea, the park does signify a pastoral retreat or a willing exile from legal and filial obligations. Nonetheless, the risk of a flood holds the play’s Arcadian tonalities hostage, as does the subplot’s unusual choice of rustic clown: rather than parody goatherds or shepherds, Lyly introduces an errant astrologist and an alchemist’s apprentice. Lyly’s decision to feature almanac-makers and semi-occult practitioners in a pastoral drama is often linked to the historical significance of the play’s production before the court in annum mirabilis, 1588 – not only Armada Year but also a year burdened with omens and signs introduced to the public by the Queen’s astrologer, John Dee. In addition to being topical, astrology and alchemy draw attention to the explosiveness of unlike combinations controlled in Francesco I de’ Medici’s sea grotto. As the Alchemist’s “black boy,” Peter, observes (ostensibly while covered with soot), his master practices alchemy through “sublimation, almigation, calcination, rubification, incorporation, circination, cementation, albification, and f[er]mentation, with as many
terms impossible to be uttered as the art to be compassed” (II.iii.11 – 14). This catalogue of alchemical terms, replete with error, was certainly intended to provoke laughter. Yet these unnatural activities replicate the language of heterosexual coupling in the fifth act when Rafe (an apprentice who tries his hand at alchemy) describes his master’s multiplication: “Why, man, I saw a pretty wench come to his shop, where with puffing, blowing, and sweating he so plied her that he multiplied her” (V.i.18 – 20). Alchemical change generates new bodies, as this coarse description of heterosexual pairing mathematically predicts, but it also requires forced, artisanal labor and an attendant dissolution. Neither of these practices fits within the safe haven of Gallathea and Phyllida’s allocated retreat. Rather, mixing two different sexes or two different metals evokes a series of forced, metallurgical convergences: literally, marriages are forged products.

Flood seasons and epic-scale dissolution, then, historically associated with an avenging, interventionist deity, must exist in Renaissance pastoral if only to support the premise that a utopian paradise will harbor its own negation. Yet a providential interpretive analytic fails to offer a sufficient mode of understanding some late sixteenth-century cultural texts of epic-scale deluge that are adapted from Plato’s Critias and Timaeus and present in both Boboli’s strange aquatic bower or Lyly’s twinning sea and land economies in Gallathea. In Boboli, the stalactite sheep, nymphs and shepherds perish while the mountaineers of the fresco (inspired by the unlettered survivors of the
Timaeus) walk freely. Moreover, hydraulic technology, a product of secular authority, isolates the reigning – or “raining” – Medici from the inundated guests of the grotto, not piety. A pious monarch would acknowledge defeat in the face of anomalous weather or seek its religious significance rather than recreate it or lessen its impact by turning to alternative historical traditions that identify global floods as seasonal. In Lyly’s pastoral comedy, Neptune’s ability to mar the greenworld encounters serious challenges: twin, euphuistic seafaring economies and a resolute love between two intensely similar (self-attracting) girls that ends in marriage. Gallathea even ends by refusing the sea god’s tribute. Of more concern than the religious context is the relationship between the necessity for heterosexual coupling in political states that require patrilineal succession and the distempered floods that inescapably infiltrate peaceful Arcadian spaces. From Pythagoras’s geographic reversals to the cryptic anchors found at high elevations to Boboli’s erotic sea changes, deluge narratives that acknowledge recurrent or seasonal epic-scale dissolution subordinate biblical natural histories to a variety of secular and aesthetic concerns.

Key among the implications of Renaissance Neoplatonism found in the Timaeus is the possibility of forgotten history and the cyclical devolution of the body politic to watery turmoil and savage obscurity. In poetry, this ancestral anxiety finds expression in countless episodes of cross-gender erotic drowning and the tendency, such as that of Shakespeare’s Polixenes, to equate an impar coniugium with the kind of deluge that
destroys both material forms of historical record and the grounded family tree. 

*Gallathea*’s single stage prop – an oak tree that grew where Neptune’s antediluvian temple once stood – reminds audiences of the appeal of age and immobility present in the Tudor family tree, where the Queen’s self constancy thwarted various inundations of difference: the Catholic, continental or otherwise exotic influence of a prince. “Wifely status,” as Laurie Shannon observes of the Queen’s strategic decision to evade marriage, “would dethrone even a sitting monarch.”

Although Elizabeth avoided the global metamorphosis of flood by staying single, Thomas Dekker described the wondrous occasion of her death as an earthquake – a fissure or diachronic gap in regnal temporality – in 1603: “Oh what an Earth-quake,” he observes, “is the alteration of a State...the whole Kingdome seemes a wilderness.” Regardless, the natural cataclysm occasioned by the Queen’s death lasted for one year rather than forty-five, the duration of her reign and the theoretical number of years for the body politic’s deliquescence had she married into an unequal union.

2.3. “Villain mountaineers” and Postdiluvian Succession in *Cymbeline*

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In Shakespeare’s late romance, *Cymbeline* (1610), one of the starkest greenworlds imaginable provides dry ground for Belarius, his wife Euriphile and three royal children as they escape an evil stepmother and her son, Cloten, and, as a consequence, disrupt the succession of power in the King’s family. Written nearly thirty years after the two flood-related texts above, *Cymbeline* was performed under vastly different cultural and historical contexts. At the time of the play’s production James Stuart had reigned for seven years in England and forty-three years in Scotland. Moreover, he had two healthy sons, Henry and Charles, before he ascended the English throne in 1603. Thus it would appear that there was no immediate threat to the Stuart bloodline in 1610. If sixteenth-century pastoral frequently made impossible Elizabeth’s demise, it did so through both eternal Spring and cyclical holidays and found productive similitude in the unchanging heavens and the natural world’s preference for likenesses. As a result, when a flood appears in *Gallathea*, it retreats, ruled by the cult of the Virgin Queen and the rhetorical power of her insolvency. The bloodline of James I, an eternal “spring” of its own, did not require the same ideological work from a greenworld court theatrical whose ecology imitated that of the crown. Nonetheless, the ghost of an earlier trope, the vision of a tidal plain Arcadia from the Elizabethan comedy and the Medicean sea grotto above, returns provocatively in 1610.

Upon closer examination, many similarities exist between *Cymbeline* and *Gallathea*. In *Cymbeline*, a foreign invasion threatens the boundaries of the state and a
daughter’s decision to cross dress as a young man, Fidele, leads to comic recognition, the recovery of lost siblings, and a reunited royal family. Even if the play’s conclusion tells us that Imogen (the cross-dressed daughter) eventually marries Posthumus, whom the King calls a “beggar,” the recovery of two male heirs prohibits the children of Imogen and Posthumus’s cross-class marriage from governing the kingdom. The boys’ recovery also evades the legal difficulties of a royal line that passes through a female heir. Shakespeare thus dilutes the subversive power of a cross-class marriage by making its progeny essentially irrelevant to monarchical succession. In addition, order prevails in this romance (or tragicomedy) through many of the same structural motifs as in an Elizabethan festive comedy: young, thwarted lovers eventually marry, familial tension abates, and the nation makes peace with a foreign adversary.

Nonetheless, key differences account for the particularities of this play’s age. Most evidently, the self-attracting natural order in this text replicates the gender configuration of James’s own children: Henry, Charles, and Elizabeth Stuart – two sons and a daughter. But, as importantly, Shakespeare’s 1610 greenworld, where the siblings’ reunite, changes significantly. In an unexpected turn of events, Shakespeare’s late greenworld is permanently gray. Cymbeline’s unjustly banished characters flee to a “mountain top” – Milford Haven – which, as I will argue, functions as an Ovidian Parnassus (III.vi.5). This vertical ascent saves the King’s biological children from his lethal impar coniugium and the impact of a second, equally devastating union between
Cloten, a would-be rapist, and Imogen, the play’s heroine. With passing reference to “Neptune’s park,” Shakespeare narrates a potential epic-scale dissolution, but shifts his heaven to the dry wilderness of Wales, which along with Scotland and Ireland, was thrust into an early Stuart ideology that required “imperial rule of all the Sea-girt isles” (III.i.19).34

On one hand, an Ovidian Parnassus in Wales was not a completely unusual concept since geographic encomium dovetailed with efforts to consolidate territory for the English. As Joan Fitzpatrick observes, “making ‘Britain’ stand as a label for all the islands on the eastern rim of the North Atlantic Ocean, just north-west of the main continental land mass, was a political project begun around the time of Shakespeare and Spenser.”35 James Stuart was declared King of “Great Britain” in 1604 and Wales joined England after the Acts of Union in 1535 and 1542. Because of these legal negotiations, Cymbeline’s famous lines on the subject of geographic patriotism (i.e., “the natural bravery of your isle”) made more sense for national self-definition and representation although it did little to deny two important facts related to England’s counterfactual history of internecine warfare: namely, that Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Danish and Norman invaders successfully breached the sea’s defense in the past and that internal factions


among the English nobility historically posed an equally significant threat to any project designed to increase the centralization of England’s authority and that of an absolutist monarchy (III.i.18). Not yet an imperial power, the body politic’s need for physical survival in 1610 was still widely apparent.

Yet that Cymbeline’s constant haven exists in Wales is remarkable given that the play has another, more mutable greenworld: a garden where the Queen retreats in the play’s first scene. However, Shakespeare emphasizes the garden’s corruption through its ties to the Queen. Unlike Perdita, who stubbornly insists on a native, “rustic garden” in The Winter’s Tale (1611), the evil stepmother in Cymbeline tyrannizes over an environment replete with the forged convergences of Lyly’s alchemists. Her ladies gather the garden’s violets, cowslips, and primroses (vestiges of the pastoral tradition) and carry them to the interior spaces of her closet for malevolent occult experiment. With aid from the doctor, Cornelius, the Queen’s perversions contra naturam include the desire to obtain the “poisonous compounds” of plants and “try [their] forces…on such creatures as // we count not worth the hanging,” such as cats and dogs (I.v.8, 18 – 20). From his first scene, Shakespeare aligns the garden’s toxicity with that of the court, thereby preventing his audience from associating traditional horticulture with either material gain or spiritual succor. By doing so, he derails our expectations of a salutary, cultivated environment.
Husbandry in the Queen’s garden borrows more from the witchcraft of the fairy tale than the moral and economic tenets of the early seventeenth century promoted by the Christianized georgic. These tenets, such as those written by Francis Bacon, who famously proposed a “georgics of the mind, concerning its husbandry and tillage thereof,” endorsed a broad ranging philosophy of cultuum animi that extended to a number of period cultivations, such as civic self-fashioning and the establishment of colonies for profit in America and Ireland. In defiance of these trends, Shakespeare’s refuge from courtly vice denies the possibility of a georgic ethic of improvement in this play. Cymbeline’s national garden, a corrupt Arcadian locale, poisons rather than heals. Thus Cymbeline announces that the royal garden is misgoverned in the first scene and implies that the lost, antediluvian world of the Golden Age is irretrievable through patient labor and cultuum animi. Unlike Lyly’s Lincolnshire tidal plain, Cymbeline’s court is already awash with ruin. Only a radical intervention or wonder – Jove himself – will successfully reanimate the body politic as signified by the play’s contaminated garden.

36 Qtd. in Low, p. 131. See also Stanley Fish’s exploration of this passage in his Self-Consuming Artifacts. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1972), p. 78.

37 In The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus and Gender, Jeanne Roberts argues that the “sterile heaths, oceans, rocky and desert places” in Shakespeare’s plays suppress more authentic greenworlds; she specifically refers to Milford Haven as an “almost neutralized green world.” Yet it is the Queen’s garden that is sterile rather than Milford Haven, where the transplanted princes grow. The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus and Gender. (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1991), pp. 25, 51.
To complement the corrupt garden, the ghost of pastoral briefly appears in the same scene that otherwise positions the play for tragedy, violence, and separation. This early invocation of the salutary eclogue serves only as a statement of despair, a pattern that reflects trends in Shakespeare’s late plays. When Imogen rebels against her father, she wishes that she were a “neatherd’s daughter” and “Leonatus // our neighbor shepherd’s son” (I.i.149 – 150). Cymbeline, who demands filial obedience, replies with insult, “Thou foolish thing!,” and sends her away (I.i.150). Cymbeline’s attempts to enclose his daughter and withhold her circulation from Posthumus, a man she has illegally wed, merely reflect his own unhealthy and decidedly effeminizing obedience to his second wife, who counsels him in affairs of state, and his misguided effort to control his daughter’s biological and social reproduction. As Shakespeare makes the error of a toxic marriage evident throughout the play, it is critical to recall that he introduced it in combination with a set of conflicts that inspire Imogen’s pastoral solution. If Imogen could enter the mythical world of the Golden Age, she would enjoy its many pleasant traditions: freedom from parental tyranny, an unchanging, mild countryside, and an innocuous sociopolitical climate. She would enjoy these traditions with Posthumus, a good man who has been banished by the same court that bred him. As courtiers remark in the first scene, Posthumus is a “poor but worthy gentleman” (I.i.7). In Imogen’s idyllic world, she would be reborn as the child of a cowherd, and her lover would be the son of a shepherd. Indeed, she journeys toward this unforgotten dream of the simple
life in Act III. But the storm that dismembered her family tree reigns unabated and prevents the pastoral condition from coming into being. In this play, no self-exiling royals, blessed with eternal love, tend sheep and engage in poetry contests. In lieu of this environment, Imogen (whose name evokes the imagination) says that a distempered cold spell disrupts the normative progression of her relationship with Posthumus: “comes in my father, // and like the tyrannous breathing of the north // shakes all our buds from growing” (I.iii.35 – 37). But Shakespeare calls upon his audience to remember that once such worlds existed.

Shakespeare plunges the embattled survivors of the court into a venatic wonderland where the traditions of pastoral and georgic collide with those of Jacobean theater. A partially hidden flood narrative unites the first two Virgilian modes with the fairly recent developments of romance. This narrative is difficult to discern because it is not recounted until Act III when the King’s primary victim, Belarius, describes the court’s past horrific injustice with the semiotics of a storm: “but in one night,” he recalls, “a storm or robbery, call it what you will, // shook down my mellow hangings, nay, my leaves, // and left me bare to weather” (III.iii.61 – 64). Transformed into a naked tree out of season, Belarius uproots the King’s heirs and seeks solace in the one place where he cannot reawaken his dormant leaves or again become the plant “whose boughs did bend with fruit” of public acclaim bestowed by the crown (III.iii.61). Because of this storm, Belarius becomes one of Shakespeare’s unaccommodated men, such as Lear, whose
sojourn into nature is particularly ambivalent. On one hand, Belarius seems to believe that the struggle of daily life in a cavern actualizes self-realization through sacrifice. Yet the cave’s very isolation undermines his sense of obligation to repair the political turmoil in Britain’s body politic. Geographically remote from the weatherly activity of court and the rejuvenation of Arcadia’s Spring, the group formed in Milford Haven’s venatic world neither plants crops nor herds flocks. Stewards of property that is impossible to own or to cultivate, they evade the civic obligations of those in recognizable living situations. Moreover, unlike ploughmen, who engage in the redemptive labor of Adam and his many descendents, Belarius and the two princes’ primary labor is the savage sport of the hunt.

Dulled by *otium*, Milford Haven’s restless inhabitants cannot cultivate earth (the aim of georgic) or letters (the aim of pastoral) and encounter little joy in the primitivism of their domestic lives. As Francoise Laroque observes of the traditional greenworld, “the green world is a place of change and metamorphosis, where the reinvigorating contact with nature enables people to free themselves from the constraints and injustices of society and to find fulfillment.”38 To Laroque, the atmosphere is certainly festive, not oppressive. In this play, Milford Haven’s rock-climbing and hunting are exhausting, and no one is fulfilled. The “thoroughly weary” princes, whom Belarius kidnaps when

they are infants, are told to share the ambition of a creature like a “sharded beetle,”
whose defensive armor and innate baseness protects it from harm (III.vi.36). To
Guiderius, the cave is not a secure respite from the town’s corruption but ironically it is
a “cell of ignorance,” a “prison, or a debtor” (III.iii.33 – 34).

To assuage their sense of captivity, Belarius encourages the princes to value the
limitations of their home by aligning the cave’s geographical configuration with the
necessary servility of mankind. But despite this effort at exemplum, his pedagogy has
little effect. “This gate,” Belarius intones of the cavern’s entrance, “instructs you how
t’adore the heavens” (III.iii.2 - 3). Even as the cave’s low entrance teaches the princes to
stoop, it stunts their growth while their thoughts aspire to honor and ambition in a
secular context. Perplexed, Belarius observes how the princes’ “valor, // that wildly
grows in them” yields a crop “as if it had been sowed,” while knowing full well that he
attempted to sow the seeds of humility (IV.ii.179 – 81). If anything, Milford Haven is
redolent with suppressed ambition and artificial cheerfulness. Comments such as “No
life to ours!” and “we will fear no poison, which attends // in place of greater state”
overstate the point (III.iii.26, 77 - 78). If the group lived this blissful lifestyle, their
aphorisms would hardly be necessary. The prospective vision of the “sharded beetle”
will never be more appealing to these heroic brothers than the glorious life of the “full-
winged eagle,” in particular when Jove’s descent on an eagle in the fifth act was,
according to John Dover Wilson, the “play’s chief attraction for most of the audience.”

Thus the cave is neither festive nor green and, if imitating Virgilian modes were the measure of poetic greatness, Shakespeare moves carelessly and indecisively through both pastoral and georgic in an effort to account for the passage of time in a rocky hold rather than a more habitable enclosure.

As he does so, Shakespeare directs theatergoers’ attention to a newfound fascination with caves, primitivism, and the rustic or “rude place[s]” of the natural world at the same time (1610) that many major estate gardens in England tried to emulate Italy’s achievements in the Mannerist style at Boboli or Pratolino by investing huge sums in continental features, including primitive mounts that enclosed highly-embellished sea grottos (III.vii.65). “Mannerism” stems from the Italian maniera, which translates as the possession and demonstration of style, savoir-faire and effortless accomplishment. Mannerist art emphasizes the virtue of the conquest of difficulty via technique only if “inimical to revealed passion [and] evident effort.” Mannerism emphasizes prolixity, copiousness, and baroque ornamentation over utility, and as such generated a certain antipathy with the Counter-Reformation. The exterior spaces of gardens from this period, then, evoked “ideally ordered nature, the trees in rows and

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compartments, as were the herbs and flowers, the whole composed of regular geometric units.”

Yet like other Renaissance conceits, landscape design thrived on dialogue and controversy: abundance of design was countered with brevity, clarity by obscurity, and decadence by pastoral. To achieve this contrast, a Mannerist garden required roughly hewn mountains and sea grottos, or what John Evelyn calls the “gloome part of the Garden” that affects “the eye of the beholder, after it has been sated with the softer and more luxurious objects of flowers & fields.” Among grottos, garden historians distinguish between the “rustic” grotto and the nymphaeum (Boboli’s grotta grande) primarily through architectural disposition. The rustic grotto appeared to be a plain, unornamented cave from the outside, while the nymphaeum was recognizable from its exterior as a temple dedicated to the nymphs with formal rooms that terminate in an apse. Because the rustic grotto was structured within its environment to appear prematurely aged, it was impossible to tell whether it was built into a pre-existing natural space, carved out of a rock, or if it was an ancient building overlaid with the accumulation of sediment. The less one felt able to answer this question, the more

41 Lazzaro, p. 45.

successful the design relative to the Renaissance values of variety and invention.

*Cymbeline’s* roughly hewn cave reflects a native version of these continental aesthetics.

Unsurprisingly, adding mountains to pre-existing estate grounds cost just as much as the luxurious ornamentation of a flowerbed or a citrus grove. To vary the landscape in the Italian style and incorporate the rustic elements of nature required moving earth to build terraces and diverting the courses of rivers. Andrea Wulf and Emma Gieben-Gamal narrate the story of one case in the early seventeenth century: Sir Robert Cecil’s renovations at Hatfield House. Cecil, King James’s unpopular favorite, occasionally known as a “dissembling, smooth-faced dwarf,” took possession of the estate in 1607 and began immediate renovations (with funds from “unprecedented bribes”) for ambitious plans to entertain the King in July of 1611. To create an Italianate garden, Cecil needed more space. Therefore he bought out the villagers of Hatfield at low prices, razed their homes and enclosed half of the forest. He earned such notoriety in the process that the villagers of Hatfield immortalized Robert “Robin” Cecil

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43 Montaigne, who visited Pratolino in 1580, records that the Francesco I de’ Medici intentionally “chose an inconvenient, sterile and mountainous site, yes, and even without springs, so as to have the glory of getting his water from five miles off, and his sand and lime [from] another five miles [off.]” Montaigne, Michel. *Montaigne’s Travel Journal.* Donald M. Frame, trans. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), p. 64. Luke Morgan, a grotto historian, recounts that “during the year 1615 – 16, Jean Le Mesle, a merchant from [Salomon] de Caus’s hometown of Dieppe, was paid for delivering 24,000 shells ‘gennant Perlmutter’ (mother of pearl) and 800 porcelain shells to Coudenberg Palace for ongoing work on the grottoes.” See Morgan’s *Nature as Model.* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007), p. 123.

in a contemporary ballad: “not Robin Goodfellow nor Robin Hood / but Robin th’ encloser of Hatfield Wood.”

Nonplussed by the locals whose land he dispossessed, Cecil incorporated many of the latest conspicuous Italian trends at Hatfield, including knot gardens, a water terrace and a mount with a spiral walk and panoramic vantage point. He consulted many of early Stuart England’s celebrated intellectuals: Francis Bacon, Inigo Jones and John Tradescant, whom he hired in 1610. Salomon de Caus arrived in November of 1611 and supervised a project to divert a stream to supply fountains for each of the East Garden’s three terraces and the West Garden’s panoramic mount. Cecil spent over L1,000 on de Caus’s waterworks in two months. England, willingly or not, invested an extraordinary amount of its earnings in this garden, but because Cecil died in 1612 the gardens (like those of Prince Henry’s Richmond) never reached completion.

Furthermore, Shakespeare echoed the court’s interest in exploring the versatility between ornamentation and primitive, uncultivated landscapes, especially if he saw Inigo Jones’s scenography for *Oberon, the Fairy Prince* (1611) in which “rocky escarpment” opens to reveal a rich and beautiful palace or earlier Elizabethan entertainments where an Adamantine rock opened to release imprisoned knights. The

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45 Wulf and Gieben-Gamal, p. 15.

46 The importance of grottos such as those at Boboli is also seen in Salomon de Caus’s official title at Heidelberg, where he went to build gardens for the Elector of Palatine and his wife, the Princess Elizabeth. De Caus was the “Master of Gardens, Fountains and Grottos.”
cavern in *Cymbeline* also acted as a confinement or “savage hold” for its crown princes, who identify Imogen-Fidele as a “fairy” (III.vi.18, 41). Moreover, the artificial mount at Queen Anne’s London residence, Somerset House, would have caught Shakespeare’s eye. Hydraulics engineer Salomon de Caus, who worked in England from 1607/8 – 1613, began remodeling Somerset’s garden in 1609 and designed as its focal point a Pratolino-style Mount Parnassus grotto. The Works Accounts of 1609 record payment for “the making of a Force with divers brass workes” to raise water from the Thames to feed the Parnassus.\(^47\) Garden historian Roy Strong refers to Somerset’s mount as “one of the most striking garden ensembles in the new manner in early Jacobean England.”\(^48\) In 1613, J.W. Neumayr, the German escort to the Duke of Saxony, describes it as follows:

> To one side stands a Mount Parnassus: the mountain or rock is made of sea-stones, all sorts of mussels, snails, and other curious plants put together: all kinds of herbs and flowers grow out of the rock which are a great pleasure to behold. On the side facing the palace is made like a cavern. Inside it sit the Muses, and have all sorts of instruments in [their] hands. Uppermost at the top stands Pegasus, a golden horse with wings.\(^49\)

Near the palace and bordering the Thames stood a peculiar, artificial mount adorned with objects drawn from the sea. Even stranger, this mountain housed statues of the Muses, who, like the English royal family, were patrons of the arts and sciences. Shakespeare could not have failed to notice this exciting intrusion into Somerset’s


\(^{48}\) Strong, p. 92.

\(^{49}\) qtd. in Strong, p. 91.
landscape, for its dimensions were thirty feet high and eighty feet in diameter. A special pump carried water from the Thames to the mountain’s top, where a Pegasus struck his foot to uncover the “hidden spring.” There had been nothing like it in English gardens before.

Despite this mountain’s physical proximity to Whitehall, scholarship has yet to link Somerset’s gardening innovation with Hellenistic flood mythology, Cymbeline’s historiographical interest in antediluvian origins, or the complex generic hybridity that results from an inorganic greenworld. To substantiate my argument that these three subjects pertain to one another, it is necessary to remember that the Parnassus built at Somerset was not only the home of the muses in Greek mythology. According to the first book of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Deucalion and Pyrrha’s ark lands on Mount Parnassus, “which alone was unsubmerged” after an epic-scale deluge destroys the earth.50 This geographical detail makes Parnassus an essential source of continuity or succession between entire civilizations, or, on the micro-scale, between generations. Somerset’s Parnassus and Shakespeare’s Milford Haven are both environments unlike those represented by traditional georgic or pastoral landscapes but quite familiar in the context of Ovidian flood narratives.

In Cymbeline, the two branches of the royal family (Guiderius and Arviragus) who survive the malevolent court completely unscathed mature “unlettered and

uncultured” just as the *Timaeus* predicts will repeatedly happen to the Greeks after cyclical flooding. These two male heirs revive the fallen generation by keeping intact an antediluvian bloodline. True to both Noachian and Hellenistic flood narratives, Shakespeare also assigns Belarius and his wife, Eurephile, the role of the only righteous couple (Deucalion and Pyrrha) whose descendants repopulate the world. As George Sandys announces in his 1632 gloss of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Noah and Deucalion represent history and fable and are “celebrated for their Justice and Religion.”\(^{51}\) God commands Noah, the only pious man left, to build the ark, which rests on “mount Ararat” while Prometheus (the fable’s figure of “diuine Prouidence”) commands Deucalion to build his ark, which comes to rest on Mount Parnassus. To Sandys, Ovid’s deluge narrative shares the moral of Prometheus, whose talent was to make men from clay: “both [myths] including one morall; that of saluage men they made civill.”\(^{52}\) Furthermore, as Sandys writes, “there is no nation so barbarous, no not the salvage Virginians, but haue some notion of so great a ruine.”\(^{53}\)

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\(^{52}\) Sandys, p. 33.

\(^{53}\) Sandys, p. 31. Francis Bacon (1625) and Richard Hakluyt (1600) both hypothesize that America was once Atlantis. In his essay, “On the Vicissitude of Things,” Bacon writes that “the great winding-sheets that bury all things in oblivion are two: deluges and earthquakes.” Bacon speculates that the people of the “West Indies” were “remnants of generations of men [who] were in such a particular deluge saved” by hiding away in the Andes.” In *Francis Bacon: Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1996), p. 451. Richard Hakluyt’s 1600 epistle dedicatory to Sir Robert Cecil
The British descendents of “so great a ruine” survive the disorder of the royal
*impar coniugium* by escaping to a difficult life in the mountains of Wales. As “hot
summer’s tanlings and // the shrinking slaves of winter,” they learn nothing of court
culture other than the rigors of the hunt (James’s own passion) and the victorious Lord
of the Feast (IV.iv.29 – 30). Belarius directly addresses the issue of saving these children
albeit interrupting succession in his mock appeal to the King:

> O Cymbeline, heaven and my conscience knows
> Thou didst unjustly banish me; whereon,
> At three and two years old, I stole these babes,
> Thinking to bar thee of succession as
> Thou reft’st me of my lands. (III.iii.99 – 103)

As Belarius explains, the dissolution of one household justifies the dissolution of
the next. Cymbeline “reft’st” Belarius of land and Belarius bars Cymbeline of heirs who
would receive crown property. Yet as the play proceeds, the ecological disaster
narrative promised by “so great a ruine” at the origin of English history collides with the
generic dispensations of pastoral-romance: Imogen and Posthumus reunite, and the
restoration of the two princes reclaims the course of nature.

But this fails to explain why the Virginians, the ancient Britons, and the
postdiluvian Greeks share Sandys’s memory of “so great a ruine.” Nancy Vickers has
describes his *Voyages and Discoveries* as the “rude lineaments [of] my Western Atlantis, or
observed that, “as a privileged mode of signifying, the recounting of a mythical tale within a literary text reveals concerns, whether conscious or unconscious, which are basic to the text.”

Vickers goes on to argue that myths are deceptively simple in their staging, but extraordinarily complex in their meaning. Parnassus locates the tension between two contradictory forces, obliteration and memoria literarum. On one hand, Parnassus commits the royals, poets, and intellectuals who value it to the humanist endeavor. As evident from early Italian humanism, the undying laurel of literary fame transcends individual mortality and offers one alternative to biological reproduction. The mountain’s Pegasus and its Nine Muses signify both the structural foundation of a civilization (continuity, peace) and its crowning apex (epic poetry, knowledge).

Parnassus could be read as a monumental laurel: while the laurel was evergreen and thus invulnerable to seasonal change, the haven Parnassus was uniquely invulnerable to seasonal flooding. On the other hand, this adaptation of the Classical eco-mythology of perseverance required that early moderns acknowledge something far more sinister. Parnassus is an unequivocal reminder of the epic-scale dissolution of the very civilization it supports. From the perspective of environmental stability, it bears the memory of doom and the wellspring of epic fame.

Nonetheless, it is of little consolation to the literati that those who survive the earth’s watery destruction are among its least civilized, or that its monuments of learning will be lost. Eventually a civilization’s Golden Age will be reduced to the “neat cookery” of a cave-keeper who, as the princes surmise, will “cut our roots in characters” (IV.ii.49). As they recovered the history of the loss of Atlantis and the loss of Greek civilization(s) in the Timaeus and Critias, it is difficult to suppose that early moderns felt that their fledgling national traditions would be invulnerable to global decay, monumental ruin, and cataclysmic vicissitude. Nonetheless, in Shakespeare’s romance finale, a charmed book flies out of the sky and demands belief in the survival of sacred meaning. The providential book, delivered by Jove, inspires Posthumus to act and to cease his despair. As his name suggests, Posthumus defeats mortality by locating his life history in the prophetic text. But the playwright is the ultimate deity of Cymbeline, since Shakespeare achieved a posthumous life (as he predicted) through the immortalizing power of lyric verse represented by Parnassus and the fame of authorship. Ovid’s final lines capture this transcendent power:

Yet shall the better part of me assured be to climb
Aloft above the starry sky; and all the world shall never
Be able for to quench my name. For look how far so ever
The Roman empire by the right of conquest shall extend,
So far shall all folk read this work. And time without all end
(If poets as by prophecy about the truth may aim)
My life shall everlastingly be lengthened still by fame.55

55 Ovid, (XV.989 – 995).
A wondrous solution to Cymbeline’s impossible geopolitical conditions is the trademark of romance – the only suitable literary form for Shakespeare at the apogee of his long career.
3. In the Wake of the Golden Age: Pastoral in Thomas Dekker’s *THE Wonder-full yeare* (1603) and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606)

3.1 A Climactic Year

The “wonderful” year is a peculiar title for the professional dramatist and print author, Thomas Dekker (c. 1572 – 1632), to give a sad year. Even more peculiar is the fact that Dekker starts his visceral account of wonder, the plague, and the sudden death of the Queen with the calm and elegance of pastoral. Pastoral, despite its ties with court intrigue, is a literary form chiefly known to glorify a pleasant, Arcadian greenworld. Poets who write in the mode of pastoral celebrate the Golden Age with highly rhetorical, Classical allusions and they invoke the immortalizing power of lyric verse. Occupants of pastoral communities engage in cyclical festivals and folk customs that inspire
continuity over and above seasonal alteration, which (if it occurs at all) in pastoral is fully organic and spiritually redemptive. As Judith Haber observes, “pastoral seeks a lyric moment that will last forever.”¹ A pastoral landscape typically features excellent, clean air, because of “sweete Odours that breath[e] from flowers, hearbes and trees,” and seems everywhere to display signs of undisturbed fecundity.²

Dekker is fully aware of these traditions, and because he announces his will be a pastoral, he initially describes London with the Arcadian tonalities of this literary mode: the Sun peacefully enters Aries in March, the “Cuckooe plide it all day long,” lambs frisk, shepherds pipe and “Louers ma[k]e Sonnets for their Lasses.”³ However, larks and olive trees disappear after the account’s first few pages, as Dekker acknowledges that pastoral’s utopian habitat is dramatically unlike that of the “protean climactericall” year of 1603. Try as he might, Dekker cannot deny that 1603’s conditions are those of rapid change; one monarch passed away, another came to the throne. For the remainder of this section, I use Dekker’s brief account of 1603 from the early modern popular press


2 Dekker, Thomas. *The Wonder-full yeare.* (London: Thomas Creede, 1603), p. 5. My pagination is based on an online copy of Dekker’s text available at http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/yeare.html. However, additional evidence to support my position that Dekker promises pastoral derives from the text’s frontispiece (which is an illustration of flowers, birds, and branches arranged in the fashion of a knot garden), which I found in EEBO’s archive.

3 Dekker, p. 5.
to argue that pastoral is incompatible with modernity. However, since “we have never been modern,” as French sociologist Bruno Latour persuasively argues in his 1991 monograph by the same name, I conclude with the claim that this particular aesthetic form continues on as a residual, albeit tenacious, mode. I use William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606) to demonstrate the utility of reading for a pastoral inclination despite the form’s apparent disappearance, particularly as it pertains to the play’s close scrutiny of nature.

Throughout, I argue that both Dekker’s disavowal of the pastoral and Shakespeare’s decision to include it in spectral moments particularizes a key tenet of literary studies: namely, that genre operates as a contract between a reader and a writer. When a writer violates generic protocol, readers or playgoers experience the cognitive dissonance of half-alien modes and unrealized expectations. Yet generic self-contradiction and aesthetic innovation – literary scandals – frequently accompany social and historical change, such as the start of a new dynastic line. Because *The Wonderfull yeare* was not quite a newspaper (which scholars agree developed in the third or fourth decade of the seventeenth century) or a chronicle history, it is notoriously difficult to classify but extremely important for us to understand, particularly given its investment in parsing the close relationships between cataclysmic signs in the natural world and the degree of (un)naturalness tied to regnal succession at the close of the sixteenth century. Entanglements among nature, culture, and literary form create the basis for
“ecocriticism,” a field of literary criticism relatively new to Renaissance Studies that focuses on domains of inquiry (plant life, animals, metallurgy, cosmology, and essentially anything non-human) traditionally reserved for the social sciences or the “hard” sciences.

However, ongoing work in relatively new disciplines such as philosophy, history, and sociology of science now encourages us to see that no absolute barrier or infinite divide between what we call “persons” and their environments exists. Instead, as Julian Yates observes, ecology (the methodology of ecocriticism) regards persons and environments as “coproductions, durable if still artificial constellations…which [ecology] aspires to represent without reduction.” In other words, many literary critics now value the symmetry of a feedback loop rather than a binary division. For example, as interest in animals has come to supplement and restructure the study of the human and the subjects favored by the humanities, now scholarly work on early moderns’ relationships to their environments supplements the burgeoning field of corporeality,

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4 “Ecocriticism” refers to a critical methodology and a textual canon established by Anglo-American literary institutions in 1992 at a meeting of the Western Literature Association in Reno, Nevada. After this meeting, a scholarly group, The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), formed and a reader, journal, and textbook followed. Interest from university presses resulted in anthologies, ecocritical monographs, requisite controversies and internal fissures. See Michael P. Cohen’s “Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism Under Critique.” Environmental History (9) 2004: 9 – 36.

the passions and the theory of embodiment. Furthermore, ecology’s focus on relationships releases us from a double bind that essentially recognizes two attitudes toward environments in plays, books, and poetry: texts that somehow signal the praise of nature (the aesthetic) or texts and criticism that demand renewed stewardship of nature (the ethical). While the former is too easily reducible to subjective utterances, the latter’s tendency to rely on the authority of hard facts replicates a classic division.

*Seasons and Sovereigns* argues that nature and art or persons and their environments are best described as temporarily stable co-productions.

In the Renaissance, many writers had no qualms about this assertion. Furthermore, as Keith Thomas observes, the period’s “capacity to invest the natural world with symbolic meaning for human life was almost infinite.”

Following his pastoral introduction, Dekker offers an onslaught of information about 1603 by way of clever epigrams, tragic speeches, weather reports, a catalog of natural wonders, an exposé of medical charlatans, and an extended consideration of being buried alive.

Afraid that civic unrest will lead to rebellion and war, *THE Wonder-full yeare* finds internal connections between the farmer’s cottage and the civil wars in France, the “wise-acred Landlord” and the usurping villain, the “Lorde Maior” and the great Turk, London’s grim “vnsought Allies and vnwholesome places” and palaces at Richmond

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6 Thomas, Keith. *Man and the Natural World.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 65. I believe that Thomas would also support the inverse: the Renaissance capacity to invest human life with meaning from the natural world was also infinite.
and White-Hall. Not to be undone by the dual capacities of kingship, Dekker bravely improvises his way through the legal fiction of the two-bodied king and offers a reasonable explanation for the miraculous continuity of sovereignty. He takes the time to give this year a personality (shocking), a sickness (the plague) and an antidote – James I, who bursts forth onto the scene like the “Sun out of the North” with glorious beams that disperse England’s clouds of contagion. Along the way, 1603 makes a friend, the year “1588.” 1588 fulfilled more “prophecies” than “Merlin the Magitian” and became famous when the “Spanish Armado” sailed toward England and “made mens hearts colder then the frozen Zone.”7 Gathering evidence from the privy chamber to the Star Chamber, Dekker strips the “title of wonderfull” from the “terrible 88” and “bestow[s] [it] upon 1603.” Dekker shows that the parentless year of 1603 is the watershed moment in national history, because all members of the body politic suffer together from twin crises: an unprecedented change of state that united the bloodlines of England and Scotland and a visitation of the plague.

7 Dekker, p. 11.
Figure 4: frontispiece, Thomas Dekker's *The Wonder-full yeare* (1603)

Despite a slightly comic tone, *The Wonder-full yeare* does not mince words when it witnesses the psychological impact of the Queen’s death. An unmapped, wondrous course was precisely what the English began when Elizabeth died thus ending a forty-five year reign and the Tudor line. Many of her subjects had never lived under a different monarch. Contemplating these unique historical circumstances, Dekker observes that “a nation that was almost begotten and born vnder her; that neuer shouted any other *Aue* than for her name, neuer sawe the face of any Prince but her selfe, neuer
nderstood what that strange out-landish word *Change* signified.” Elizabeth not only orphaned her kingdom, but she also left it without a dictionary to interpret what “*Change signified*” in the context of her successor, a “strange” or foreign king to the English people. For this reason, England was “distracted by the horror of change” while its government was held in suspense until the arrival of a new sovereign (James VI of Scotland), the important occasion of a formal entrance was even further delayed by an outbreak of the plague in London. As Dekker searches for an adequate language to express this year of sheer vicissitude, he finally calls 1603 the “Protean Climactericall yeare.” “Climactericall” meant generally critical or decisive and in the context of Galenic medicine it also referred to the sixty-third year of any individual’s life when a person was susceptible to a reversal in health or fortune. For the nation undergoing a transition of power, the climacteric was a dystopic, interstitial year of inconstancy and indeterminacy; the weight of change nearly causes Dekker’s prose to unravel in

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8 Dekker, p. 6.

9 The Queen called herself a “strange king” in the sense of “foreign” in a letter to James, July 6, 1590, in order to describe her relationship to the Scottish people: “I hope, howsoever you be pleased to bear with their audacity towards yourself, yet you will not suffer a strange king receive that indignity.” *Elizabeth I: Collected Works.* Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose, eds. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), p. 365.

10 In numerology and astrology, every seventh year contained great potential for important changes. Nine was always a significant number because of its relationship to three. Because $7 \times 9 = 63$, sixty-three was especially invested with occult meaning. According to the OED, the claim that the sixty-third year of a person’s life was especially significant or climacterical dates as far back as the 4th century.
nondescript phrases such as “chances changes, and strange shapes.” A fissure in regnal temporality was a time of liberty from ordinary restrictions, but it was also a time of danger, as “fears… [were] bred in the wombe of this altring kimgdom.” “What an Earth-quake,” Dekker laments, “is the alteration of a State … the whole Kingdome seemes a wilderness.”

Rather than assume that Dekker simply wants a moving contrast between the carefree, “iocund Holy-day” of the Queen’s life and the “hideous tempest” of the Queen’s death, it is apparent that more is at stake. Because he begins by promising pastoral, we might expect something on the order of the *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). Instead, Dekker fails to deploy the seasonal lexicon, even at the reassuring passage that briefly details James’s ascendancy. He refuses to mention nature in the text’s final pages where one would expect him to seek closure by signaling the New Year (Janus) or a fresh Arcadia. Dekker began quite self-consciously with the formulaic approach of *The Shepheardes Calender*, whose emphasis on “dewe observing of Decorum euerye where, in personages [and] in seasons” was widely admired. But there was no effort to follow the festive calendar – to incorporate the autumnal or the rough weather of winter – appears in the remainder of a text. *The Wonderfull Yeare* ends with a proliferation of

11 Dekker, p. 7.

plague tales, as the text’s frontispiece advertises, which ironically, at least to our taste, he says function “like a mery Epilogue to a dull play.” Why the failure to follow the model of pastoral? We cannot assume that pastoral failed to entertain Dekker’s target audience in London, since collections of lyric verse with Classical and bucolic allusions, such as *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), went through multiple editions. Finally, though many people may have escaped the plague by fleeing the city, Dekker specifically includes merry tales of people whose trips into the country brought misery and ill luck. In his opening, he implicates city and country: “the Country was frolikable, so was the Citie mery… streetes were full of people, people full of ioy: euery house seemed to haue a Lorde of misrule in it.”

13 By the middle of his account, however, the pastoral greenworld, urban or rural, just disappears.

Cleary, the newly sutured realm of the Stuarts seen in *The Wonder-full Yeare* fails to observe generic rules by eliminating any vestige of a pastoral homecoming. As Helen Vendler observes, some early modern texts “explicitly forbid any recourse to the idea of a recurring organic spring.”

14 When Dekker stresses radical discontinuity, or “protean climactericall,” rather than cyclical time with its recurring, organic seasonal lexicon, he implies that this particular succession is *contra naturam*, or “against nature:” an image of

13 Dekker, p. 6.

sickness itself. Dekker’s patriotic and deferential tone indicates that he sought the patronage of the crown. But his rejection of pastoral and the seasonal lexicon could also imply that he is unconvinced that the Golden Age will return. James may very well be the plague, or at least cause the plague, as the body politic opens its northern border. The “holesome receipt of a proclaimed King” are words that flatter the new sovereign. But James was kept from the privilege of triumphant entrance and trapped in Edinburgh until 1604. Determining the natural is never more political than during a succession, and for this succession, the plague may be the symptom of a city unready to welcome James Stuart.

Rather than immerse his readers in the communal temporality of rote seasonal progression (which, although it delivered truth about the world, would not deliver any news worthy of history), Dekker sets out to ease the pain of 1603’s unrivaled potential for disorder with another method. He identifies a set of adjacencies or relationships between human experience and natural phenomena – an archetypal Renaissance science Foucault refers to as “unearthing signatures” in the prose of the world.\(^{15}\) During the sixteenth century episteme, as Foucault writes, “the universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants

holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.” As Dekker unearths and publishes these occult signatures, he exposes the tangle between providence, the vicissitudes of the state and wonders in the greenworld. Sifting through these internal connections allows Dekker to rewrite frenetic disorder as an orderly climate of succession. This is particularly true when he lists a catalog of wonders that make magical the Queen’s death. The Queen was born on a “Lady Eue” and she died on a “Lady Eue.” This coincidence of astrologically and religiously meaningful dates effectively close her Maiden circle, “her Natiuitie & death being [made] memorable by this wonder.” More importantly, this fact arrests the indeterminacy of her passing. Dekker also observes that by a miracle a “Lee” was Lord Mayor when Elizabeth ascended the throne and a different “Lee” was Lord Mayor when she died. This proves that underlying laws and regularities govern change. In retrospect, the protean climate of succession, then, could not be described as mere chaos.

In other cases, translating change into profound signification depends upon strong belief in environmental and temporal symmetries. Again, the sixteenth century episteme did not view nature as an autonomously determined external reality. When Dekker reports that in 1603 “wilde Ireland” became astonishingly tame and follows with its inverse, that some great English “on the sudden turned wilde,” the total sum of

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16 Foucault, p. 17.

17 Dekker, p. 10.
civility remains intact.\textsuperscript{18} If the cultivated kingdom “seemes a wildernes, and the people
in it are transformed to wild men,” then an economy of reciprocity calls for “wilde
Ireland” to alter as well. Given that the body politic temporarily lost its head, it would
be more alarming if its previously civilized members went forward unscathed. Thus,
from this perspective, Dekker need only unearth and publish historically and culturally
credible occult signatures to stabilize succession. \textit{Macbeth} employs the same logic of
reciprocity to protest Duncan’s murder. “The night has been unruly,” Lennox
comments before he learns about the regicide, “where we lay, // our chimneys were
blown down; and, as they say, // lamentings heard i’ th’ air, strange screams of death, …
some say the earth // was feverous and did shake.”\textsuperscript{19} As these lines suggest, nature’s
portentous changes, as terrifying as they seem, are immensely welcome. Heaven’s anger
reassures men of heaven’s existence. To unearth signatures, or to feign sincerity in
doing so, is one way \textit{THE Wonder-full yeare} ameliorates a national crisis.

Finally, Dekker must abandon pastoral because it does not report the new and it
is not modern. It will not set printers, chroniclers, and typesetters into motion in quite
the same way that pamphlets dedicated to the urgent, anomalous events of 1603 will. If,
as Dekker claims, the newness of 1603 is such that it will “fill a hundred paire of writing

\textsuperscript{18}Dekker, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{19}Shakespeare, William. \textit{Macbeth} (II.iii.52, 58 – 59). In \textit{The Complete Pelican Shakespeare}, Stephen
Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller, eds. (New York: Penguin, 2002). All subsequent references to
Shakespeare’s works are to this edition and are cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line
number.
tables with notes,” then the form of the pastoral he promised cannot accommodate the content of the new.20 But despite his desire to confer greatness on 1603, the transience of these waxen, erasable tablets echoes a sentiment present in his preface to the reader: the merry tales “Rere-ward of this Booke” stem from the tongues of “flying Report” and are likely replete with rumors. Dekker questions both the veracity and the value of his text. In another ambivalent blend of insecurity and bombast, Dekker announces that as a writer he can feed the “fire of wit” that “burns in any brest” with “no other stuffe for a tweule-moneth and a day than with kindling papers full of lines” that blazon forth the marvels of the year. Will the hyperbolic excess of pamphlets generated from the hundred pairs of writing tablets in 1603 serve as 1604’s kindling in early modern homes? Stale news, Dekker implies, runs the risk of becoming disposable text. Finite kindling fuel is a far cry from the usual appeal of emblems of permanence and durability in the emerging nationalist literary tradition. More often, explicitly self-reflexive writers sought a material legacy more enduring than brass.21 Dekker’s cheap print, however, is obsessed with its own dissolution.

Why then, does Dekker abandon pastoral? As I have argued, generic self-contradiction results when a form is unable to accommodate the material in question.

20 Dekker, p. 12.

21 As Jonas Barish writes, “all the emblems for permanence and dependability come from an inanimate world of minerals or a world of conceptual abstractions, a world essentially unfeeling and inhuman, and hence exempt from change.” See his The Antithetrical Prejudice. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983), p. 104.
Dekker discards pastoral and relies instead on early modern natural philosophy (unearthing signatures in the world) and the sensationalism of the news. I have also argued that Dekker had doubts that the Golden Age would return. Nonetheless, because we have never been modern, we have never fully quit pastoral as a form of aesthetic expression. The nostalgic desire and human impulses signaled in Golden Age greenworld of love and peace (whether freshly lost or presently attainable) continue to be a powerful cultural construct. Its modifications in the later seventeenth century veered toward georgic, whose myriad instructions (both botanical and moral) on the subject of cultivation evoke the British Empire’s transplanted gardens. In the American context, frontier literature qualifies the reach of progress and expansion with the urge to abandon civilization for an isolated, Edenic landscape. Understood capaciously, then, the aesthetic form resonates throughout modernity, albeit in modified forms that eliminate popular Elizabethan conventions: self-exiling or banished royals, poet shepherds, branches of “Palme,” and oaten pipes.

Pastoral, despite some versatility, will not admit the degree of change necessary for 1603, a year which bridged two dynastic lines and forced Dekker to explore more exotic forms. Latour accounts for the paradoxical appearance of nonmodern modes, practices, and beliefs (such as pastoral’s longing for nostos) in modernity by arguing that the distinction between “early modern” and “modern” amounts to a false opposition: no such separation exists, particularly when it evokes the teleology that can accompany
historical periodization. Latour disagrees with those who condemn early modernity (his expression is the “premoderns”) as benighted or pre-scientific, whose delight in suturing bonds or finding internal connections between humans and non-humans and culture and nature needs to be overcome in order to achieve progress or signal the rise of an enlightenment philosophy that would make nature infinitely removed from human beings. To Latour, blended assemblages of nature and culture actually proliferate as technoscience increases in scale and territory; ironically, though, these networks become more difficult to discern and require a new way of looking at laboratories, petri dishes, and scientific fieldwork. Latour’s belief that modernity is not “disenchanted, [or] drained of its mysteries” calls for scholars to be wary of catchphrases such as Keith Thomas’s conception of the “decline of magic” or John Huizingha’s sense of farewell in the expression “the autumnal of the Middle Ages.”

Drained of one mystery (the pastoral), 1603 simply finds other mysteries (cataclysmic wonder), and Latour would argue that modernity does the same.

Even so, the pastoral of Sidney and Spenser did decline at Queen Elizabeth’s death, as did the English vogue for the sonnet sequence. As Amelia Zurcher Sandy observes, “in the Stuart period pastoral essentially dies in England, subsumed by the

new interest in land use that [Anthony] Low calls the ‘georgic revolution.’”

On the other hand, pastoral’s particular vision of political ecology was so intertwined with the legal-philosophical construct of the two-bodied King that it continued to serve many purposes for early Stuart poets and dramatists. The remainder of this chapter will study Shakespeare’s ability to cover the old terrain of pastoral with innovative green remedies to address the mysteries of regnal succession.

### 3.2 Macbeth’s “primrose way:” Pastoral Disavowal(s) and a Green Remedy

As literary scholars reassess Shakespeare’s status as an author of both poems and plays, they continue to map the creative reciprocity between forms of elite print culture, such as the pastoral eclogue, and the professional theatrical world where Shakespeare’s plays were performed and received. According to Patrick Cheney, Shakespeare’s chief

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24 Colin Burrow recently edited the Oxford Shakespeare’s *Complete Sonnets and Poems* in an effort to consider the totality of Shakespeare’s “non-dramatic oeuvre.” In his introduction to Shakespeare’s career as a poet, Burrow observes that the dramatists who published the First Folio in 1623 did not include any of Shakespeare’s poems, thereby inaugurating a division that at the time made sense since the poems were marketable commodities on their own but which has since had the unhappy consequence of ghettoizing the poems. Shakespeare’s poems are generally consigned to the realm of the “supplement” and the sonnets in particular have required “splendid reappraisals over the last fifty years” to even enter the Anglo-American literary canon. Burrow, Colin. *Complete Sonnets and Poems.* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2002), p. 2 – 3. Stephen Orgel also argues that, “in his own time, Shakespeare was much better known to the reading public as a
poetic influences among his contemporaries were Spenser and Marlowe, who represent profoundly different modes of artistic expression. Edmund Spenser (1552 – 1599), England’s self-professed national poet, developed an aesthetic from the career path of Virgilian modes: pastoral, georgic, and epic poetry. Christopher Marlowe’s Ovidian aesthetic, on the other hand, was more complex and more versatile. Known primarily as a dramatist, Marlowe (1564 – 1593) produced translations of Ovid, amorous verse, poems in the epic register, and stage tragedy. When Shakespeare confronted this “famed classical opposition” between Virgil and Ovid through Spenser and Marlowe, he generated unequivocally new, hybrid literary forms from older traditions.25 As Cheney writes, “Shakespeare forges his unique version of early modern authorship out of the ashes of their titanic collision.”26 This collision between page and stage appears in works poet than as a playwright.” Orgel notes that Shakespeare’s rival Ben Jonson only reluctantly included his plays in his Complete Works, published in 1616, which contained poems, prose commentary, epigrams, and masques. Orgel, Stephen. “Mr. Who He?” In A Companion to Shakespeare’s Sonnets, Michael Shoenfeldt, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 137 – 144. The drama overshadows the poems today because Shakespeare ceased to publish authorized editions of his poetry after 1594. The publication of his sonnets in 1609 by the renegade bookseller, Thomas Thorpe, is generally considered unauthorized, as were the many poems, mostly misattributed, William Jaggard included in The Passionate Pilgrim (1599). Thus, to answer the query, “How does pastoral work in tragic theater?” I also ask how poetry works in theater by considering Shakespeare as a poet-playwright.


26 Cheney, p. 9.
such as *As You Like It* (1599?), where Orlando mocks pastoral convention by posting inferior verse on Arden’s trees, *Love’s Labors Lost* (1598?), where the song of Spring rhapsodizes the lives of Arcadian shepherds, or even *Titus Andronicus* (1594), where Lavinia simultaneously reenacts the part of Philomel and uses the material text of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to narrate her assault. Incessantly returning to the differences between reading and listening, printing and stage directing, and writing and oratory enables Shakespeare to create an intertextual dialogue between Virgilian generic distinctions and the world of the theater that he sustains and modifies throughout his career.

Nonetheless, in Shakespeare’s later works, including *Macbeth* (1606?), a Spenserian influence and the desire to recreate pastoral’s Golden Age as an economic order and a statement of personal freedom are less evident than in his early comedies, sonnets and two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594). This is the case because Jacobean tragedy’s specifications (violence and intemperance as they pertain to events in a fallen world) challenge those of pastoral. But as Cheney insists, Shakespeare frequently reveals theater’s deep reliance on poetic forms inherited from Virgil through Spenser – even in his tragedies, where I will argue that tension between the “Spenserian pastoral shepherd” committed to the passive literary culture of Arcadia and the “Marlovian theatrical man” of cataclysmic signs, dramatic wonder, and rich vicissitude flourishes even in *Macbeth*, a work that inaugurates Shakespeare’s Jacobean
By taking this position, I extend Cheney’s argument that Shakespeare juxtaposes the poetic world of the shepherd with the theatrical world of the Marlovian actor to the early Stuart plays. Although he does not completely disavow the pastoral, I argue that Shakespeare’s later plays replace the Arcadian tonalities popular during Queen Elizabeth’s reign with greenworld wonders and the vivid culture of spectatorship and awe that they require. To survive in a patronage economy, Shakespeare needed to keep his dramatic aesthetic fresh and pertinent to the desires of the Stuart court. As Gary Schmidgall observes, “only a few months after Elizabeth died, an observer noted that ‘neither the memory nor the name of Queen Elizabeth is nowadays mentioned at Court,‘ and a similar remark could be made about the art associated with her reign: in the English court, Elizabethan art ended nearly as abruptly as did the life of Gloriana herself.”

Yet what were the conventions of this courtly aesthetic?

Earlier in his career Shakespeare sketches a brief, ultimately unrivaled allusion to the Virgilian tension created when the desire for an environment of *otium* is upset upon recognition of social and political realities in *III Henry VI* (1595). Because it is fairly simple to detect its patterns, it is worthwhile glancing at the topography of overt pastoral in a history play before the form retreats to the subtext of tragedy; both history

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27 Cheney, p. 78.

and tragedy center on conflicts pertaining to the legitimacy of a sovereign who behaves in the mode of a tyrant in an ailing body politic. In both forms Shakespeare takes up the question of the political through the theory of the King’s Two Bodies, explained below. In *III Henry VI*, the doomed King Henry momentarily stands apart from the civil war battlefield at York and wishes to be transformed into a youthful swain through formal oratory:

> O God! Methinks it were a happy life  
> To be no better than a homely swain.  
> To sit upon a hill, as I do now;  
> To carve out dials quaintly, point by point…  
> … So many hours must I tend my flock,  
> So many hours must I take my rest,  
> So many hours must I contemplate,  
> So many hours must I sport myself,  
> So many days my ewes have been with young,  
> So many weeks ere the poor fools will ean,  
> So many years ere I shall shear the fleece…  
> … Ah, what a life were this! How sweet! How lovely!  
> Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade  
> To shepherds looking on their seely sheep  
> Than doth a rich embroidered canopy  
> To kings that fear their subjects’ treachery?  
> O yes, it doth – a thousandfold it doth.  
> And to conclude, the shepherd’s homely curds,  
> His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,  
> His wonted sleep under a fresh tree’s shade,  
> All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,  
> Is far beyond a prince’s delicates,  
> His viands sparkling in a golden cup,  
> His body couched in a curious bed,  
> When care, mistrust, and treason waits on him. (II.v.21 – 54)

Henry’s speech illustrates three tendencies fundamental to pastoral incarnations in theater of the late sixteenth century. Just because these tendencies reside beneath the
surface of early Stuart theatrical productions should not lead us to conclude that their relevance is diminished. First, pastoral interrogates temporality. Its desire to return to a prior age of innocence offsets a current, fallen state where pain, conflict, and grief reign unabated. Pastoral functions efficiently by contrasting the purity of a lost time or state and a present state of injustice and human suffering. A pastoral reverie may be long or it may be short, but it always romanticizes a bygone age whose simplicity is reflected in rural labor in obscure villages, forests, and fields. It is a sophisticated form, as Paul Alpers argues, “of the country, but by the court or city” whose advances have eclipsed those of an agrarian economy.29 Thus while greenworld comedies (also inspired by seasonal plays and liturgical pageants), prose romance, such as Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (1580) for elite readers, and popular bucolic verse clearly share an affinity with the pleasures of the countryside (song, festivity, leisure) celebrated by Theocritus, texts of other generic kinds, such as history plays, might also include a fleeting but critical reference to the pastoral if only as contrast or irony.30 Those who


30 Theocritian pastoral (c. 310 - 260 BC) and Virgilian pastoral (41 BC) differ based on tonality and content. In Virgil’s eclogues, pain, war, and land dispossession (in addition to lost love and death) were the proper subjects of pastoral complaint. Theocritus’s idylls, on the other hand, depicted pleasant scenes of country life devoid of human suffering. For a good introduction to the genre, see Peter V. Marinelli’s *Pastoral* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1971).
write in the mode of pastoral wish to return to a better time, and by doing so their verse often “cryptically insinuates political discontent” in the present.\textsuperscript{31}

Secondly, early modern authors use pastoral to interrogate the pros and cons of socioeconomic class. In Henry’s speech, Shakespeare contrasts two literary forms through two class extremes: the shepherd and the monarch. The shepherd sits under a hawthorn bush with his “leather bottle” while the King rests under an “embroidered canopy” and takes his refreshment from a “golden cup.” Ironically, the shepherd who is deprived of material wealth rests securely while “care, mistrust, and treason” torture the King, who is seemingly insulated by the court’s highly artificial environment.\textsuperscript{32} As it parallels two highly remote persons, the text undercuts readerly expectations: one expects the powerful and wealthy man, a sovereign, to enjoy more daily freedom and more personal contentment than the laborer whose only solace is the hawthorn bush. However, despite his wealth and privilege, the powerful man is unhappy. Whether or


\textsuperscript{32} William Empson refers to this tendency in the pastoral as its “trick:” that is, this aristocratic genre valorizes the simple, country life (a life with limitations and few material possessions) as one devoid of worry and care – and modernity, capital, and industry. By valorizing this life without fully understanding it, pastoral mystifies essential class disparities. To Empson and other Marxist critics, its scenes of country life are consequently dishonest representations. For example, Empson faults Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Graveyard” as succumbing to the pastoral trick. Are “full many a flower born to blush unseen,” Empson asks, or not? As he aligns the natural order with the social order, Gray incites readers to believe that the poor man who is born without wealth or talent is “better off without opportunities” that Empson believes to be universally desirable. See William Empson’s \textit{Some Versions of Pastoral} (New York: New Directions, 1974), pp. 4 – 5.
not this assertion inspired real sympathy in 1595, Shakespeare relentlessly stages the moment when the King wishes that he were not a King. In related cases, he stages the moment when a man who lives an extraordinary life idealizes an ordinary life. This moment of aristocratic self-deliberation or self-doubt is also developed in Macbeth and other tragedies, and it has its roots in pastoral. Pastoral idealizes the shepherd whose restricted ambition allows him to live among his flock and possess authenticity and selfhood in a way that the King, who is subject to the manifold duplicity, dissimulation, flattery, and illusion required of court ritual and public performance, cannot.33

Henry also imagines that as a rustic swain he would evade all responsibilities other than shepherding, resting, thinking, and sporting, and would enjoy caring for innocent (“seely”) beasts in a life rich in otium. The stabilizing effect of anaphora in the phrase “so many hours must I” locks the King into a static temporality through oral/aural repetition. This sound effect achieved through anaphora’s stasis (a stillness represented elsewhere under the aegis of ver perpetuum) is desirable because it forestalls loss and death. In Henry’s dream life, this uninterrupted temporality regulates nature

33 In Richard II’s fantasy, he exchanges his jewels for a set of beads, his palace for a hermitage, and his “figured goblets for a dish of wood” (Richard II, III.iii.147 – 150). Monastic (perhaps celibate) retirement is another instance of Arcadian exile in the history plays. Both isolationist fantasies measure the degree to which heterosexual coupling was inescapable for Kings and Queens whose legal and fiscal responsibilities, i.e., creating a legitimate heir to the throne in a sanctified marriage, were inseparable from their domestic lives. Richard’s monastic vision is similar to that of the lone shepherd since both reflect the attendant anxiety of royals and cross-gender erotic mixing, an anxiety that Shakespeare attempts to mediate in the flourishing pastoral spaces of As You Like It (Arden) where Rosalind cross-dresses as Ganymede, a young man, during her courtship with Orlando.
and human affect according to a device as innocuous yet vital as the sun’s fixed course. Even in pastoral, ease accompanies restriction and loss of agency ironically produces bliss.

What the aristocracy might normally consider job limitations (“must I,” Henry says as a shepherd, rather than “I choose to”) are effectively reinscribed as the job benefits of an orderly *aurea mediocris*: the King finds safety in captivity, monotony, and anonymity best symbolized through his daily subjection to the towering sun. Because political dissent marked his infant ascendancy, Henry’s pastoral reverie would have appealed in part to a sympathetic Elizabethan audience, as much as the reverie’s sense of doom aligned the strength of the monarchy with the level of peace in the realm. The oration ultimately argues against the viability substituting the sheep-hook for the scepter. Even

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34 Oddly enough, praise of the Renaissance *ver perpetuum* led also to a severe reprisal. Although a flowering paradise generates bliss, a space based on an unchanging climate is also a space based on intemperance. From the moralist’s perspective, an environment without pain or labor always engenders inmoderate pleasure. The garden of earthly delights (a cousin of Henry’s rustic pastoral vision) is therefore dangerously sacrilegious. However, by taking up shepherding in this ideal environment, intellectuals attracted to literary matters evade the problems of labor and of climate. Arcadia produces a utopian climate and vegetation that grows without the need to sow or to harvest, but its animals need care — fortunately, this labor, herding sheep (occasionally goats but rarely cattle) always requires rest during midday when the sun is at its height. Therefore, shepherds have time to write and contribute toward the very palpable cloth industry. Their labor thus shields them from the sin of idleness (*accedia*) and social opprobrium. As Sir Philip Sidney observes in 1580, “Arcadia among all the provinces of Greece was ever had in singular reputation, partly for the sweetness of the air and other natural benefits, but principally for the moderate and well tempered minds of the people.” He goes on to say that the muses chose to live there, “bestowing their perfections so largely there that the very shepherds themselves had their fancies opened to…high conceits.” In *The Old Arcadia*. (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1985), p. 4. Pastoral greenworlds generate a particular climate and a particular labor suitable for creating poets; to extract the labor ruins the equation.
so, this desire to self-alienate among beasts reflects an inner sense of isolation felt by a man who has no equal in the commonwealth.

Thirdly, this key instance from III Henry VI shows us what pastoral frequently does: it shows us a normative display of government that falls short of reality. Grief-stricken soldiers immediately interrupt Henry’s escapist reverie as they flood onto the stage holding their fallen, self-murdered comrades; the degenerate Iron Age commences its grim course and the state consumes itself in internecine conflict. In III Henry VI, the reality of civil war confronts the illusion of secluded concord for all members of the body politic. Moreover, even if an Arcadian landscape were a real destination it would not admit the King. Entitled from birth, a sovereign exists in a separate category from that of the average poet shepherd as a result of the legal fiction attached to kingship and developed by Elizabethan jurists (Edmund Plowden in the Reports, 1550) to protect crown land. This legal fiction required that the mortal and material body natural of a King perfectly converge with his or her second body, the immortal and immaterial body politic. According to crown lawyers, the King’s body politic was “utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to” and was thus always alive and capable of legal ownership.35 Every King had two bodies, and, in theory, this underlying metaphysics promised fair and

uninterrupted succession from one sovereign to the next. Because his body politic was not subject to time, passion, and defects of season, and the Golden Age was without time, passion, and defects of season, the pastoral spaces of *ver perpetuum* were by nature (the heavily mediated sense of “nature” created by crown jurists) associated with the mystical perfections of the crown – yet because they were burdened with responsibility, sovereigns could never actually take the ecological (that is, the dense network of these legal-philosophical, literary, and greenworld traditions) shelter that pastoral offers. Pastoral delivers, then, a compromised enchantment for sovereigns and subjects, particularly when Shakespeare restlessly adopts the form.

To journey to the mythic space/time world of the Golden Age would cure the defects of a King’s natural body and would reflect his absolute justice, but Henry (or any monarch) could never exchange the scepter for the “sheephook” since abdication opposes his sense of embodying the commonwealth.\(^{36}\) Caught in the hybrid ontology of his legal and somatic twinship, Henry rightly yearns to become the idealized rustic swain in Arcadia that he already is as a perfect being entitled to a perfect life. From this perspective, if anyone’s rightful habitat is the sacred, ever-flowering Arcadia, it is the King’s. This urge to build an environmental paradise accounts for the ubiquitous presence of palace gardens, immense and unlikely financial investments, in Renaissance

\(^{36}\) As Polixenes rages at his son, the prince Florizell who has chosen to wed a woman whom he takes to be a shepherdess, “Thou a scepter’s heir, // That thus affects a sheephook!” In *The Winter’s Tale*, (IV.iv.418 – 419).
states from Florence to London to Versailles. Highly cultivated gardens reflect an effort to reinstate a sovereign in his or her innate perfection in a tangible and copious land of *ver perpetuum, a locus amoenus* or “privileged space.” Far from being a decadent playground for the royal family and their alcoholic fetês, the greenworld that surrounds an estate attempts to frame a state of nature undone by actuality in a way that supports the fiction necessary for the theory of a two-bodied King. In one capacity, then, Henry is utterly alien to the York battlefield and the fallen world: as a half transcendent being who embodies the body politic, he cannot die, he cannot err, and he cannot be subject to Aristotelian accident, including seasonality: winter, spring, summer, and fall. He belongs in a Theocritian idyll that is magically devoid of climate vicissitude signified by “the season’s difference,” a placeholder for an array of political and social discord. 37 But because the real commonwealth and the English seasons fall short of the Arcadian bliss experienced by those who lived during the Golden Age, Henry may not escape to another life signified by the hawthorn bush and the “seely beasts.” His destiny lies elsewhere. A divinely anointed King rules two bodies, and a pastoral haven remains only appropriate for his imaginary (though legal) capacity.

Epic oscillates with pastoral frequently in Renaissance texts modeled after Virgil, as one form serves its purpose and the other offers a reprieve for disengagement and reflection, but in other cases poets demonstrate the failure of pastoral’s vision of

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37 *As You Like It*, (II.i.6).
existence on the level of the subject. From the fallen world, we move to the fallen subject: a tragic hero. Shakespeare would have known that immoderate affect threatened to infiltrate classic pastoral spaces since Orlando’s madness leads him to destroy a greenworld bower in the very center of Orlando Furioso (1516); the first English translation of this important Italian epic appears (dedicated to the Queen) by Sir John Harington in 1591. Yet even Virgil in his tenth and final eclogue takes an antagonistic position toward pastoral through the subject as he signals the end of a commitment to Arcadian retirement. In this case, the shepherd-poet (Virgil) repudiates pastoral because of the Arcadians’ inability to understand Gallus’s tragic love for Lycoris, a woman who has betrayed him. Gallus, Virgil’s beloved friend, brings the furor of eros into the peaceful shepherding lifestyle. By doing so, Gallus risks disrupting the rustic ideal he claims to embrace throughout the entire eclogue, which is written in the voice of Virgil and of Gallus. Try as he might to tend flocks, “lie together in willows” with Phyllis or Amyntas, who signify fleeting dalliance rather than complex passion, Gallus’s thoughts turn to either his problematic love for Mars (war), his restless attachment to the treacherous Lycoris (who has fled to the Alps with his sworn enemy), or his career as a politician. One can temporarily wear the mask of an Arcadian shepherd-poet. But Gallus, and soon Virgil himself, recognizes his innate incompatibility with the moderate

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lifestyle required by pastoral. Gallus willingly resigns himself to his former life of extremity, trial, and vicissitude due to his imperfections as a human being: his curt admission that “omnia vincit Amor” or “Love conquers all” at the end of the poem can be read as curse and compliment.

For whatever reason, Gallus needs to surrender to an elegiac love that inevitably leads to suffering, yet Virgil insists that we do not judge him. To show his solidarity with Gallus, Virgil then structures his concluding pastoral eclogue around the respect and admiration that he maintains for his friend: he dedicates his poems to “Gallo, cuius amor tantum mihi crescit in horas” or “Gallus, for whom my love grows hour by hour.” Virgil’s friend-based love (amor) for Gallus echoes semantically, if not contextually, Gallus’s tragic amor for Lycoris. After all, Virgil uses the same word to describe the two relationships, amor, though to assume that these two partnerships are completely equal is to disregard a plain distinction between Lycoris’s abandonment of Gallus and Virgil’s continuing goodwill toward his friend, as it is to disregard the damaging cross-gender eroticism of the first relationship. As Michael C.J. Putnam observes of Virgil’s final lines, “instead of rejecting Gallus when he has rejected ‘pastoral,’ the poet himself makes the

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39 A moderate lifestyle is not always an idyllic lifestyle. I read the tenth eclogue as a measured attack on the belief that pastoral existence is a valid substitute for a fully lived life where experience inevitably includes pain and suffering. Stripped of aesthetic value, an eclogue’s utility is mere distraction, and the tenth eclogue’s Arcadians such as Pan are exposed as uncomprehending.

40 Virgil, p. 99.
burgeoning of love his final theme...he thus concludes his *Eclogues* with a denial of part of the apparatus the other poems have always assumed."41 In his farewell, as Putnam makes evident, Virgil denies the power of the fantasy assumed by his previous nine poems. It is significant that Virgil ends his study of the pastoral by commemorating those who cannot bear to live its moderate lifestyle, but it is also significant that he does so through *poesis*, itself a product of detachment and reflection linked to a developing concept of Arcadian subjectivity.

Thus Shakespeare, as he begins to write his last plays, was familiar with at least two challenges (the Iron Age and immoderate affect) embedded in the pastoral ideal of timeless serenity that could generate tragic consequences. In the first case, external reality intrudes and a corrupt society renders pastoral impossible. In the Iron Age’s climate of vicissitude, pastoral is within memory but it is permanently irretrievable. In the second case, the subject renders pastoral undesirable. Arcadia’s newcomers willfully reject their own chance to engage in trivial, benign, or risk-free labors (such as poetry contests and sheep-shearing festivals) to continue to fight an impossible battle, to hunger for power, or to rebel against an authority.42 These two challenges, violence and intemperance, resurface in Shakespeare’s works from the early decades of the


42 Below, in my discussion of *Venus and Adonis*, I argue that to trivialize Arcadian pastimes sometimes occludes the serious philosophical inquiry that they conceal.
seventeenth century where tragic heroes on par with Gallus or Henry VI move in a world that has deemed Arcadia’s simple life of poetry, green pastures, and self-possession obsolete. Less interested in the rote application of pastoral for the stage in his later works until The Winter’s Tale (1610), Shakespeare nonetheless encodes the memory of this Virgilian form in many of his tragedies. In Macbeth, the dark world of witchcraft and terror that unfolds on the spectacular “blasted heath” is a complete reverse of the Elizabethan pastoral (I.iii.77). In particular, the pastourelle, a mode whose chief distinguishing feature was a chance encounter between a male chivalric adventurer and a shepherdess whom he solicits sexually, appears in reverse throughout the equivocating and sexually suggestive congress (or “supernatural soliciting”) between Macbeth, Banquo and the three “weyward” or “weird” sisters whose claim to peer into the “seeds of time” underscores the pollution of an untamed female force (I.iii.130, 32, 58). Surrounded by animals (lizard, bat, toad, adder) whom they maul rather than protect, these three women both detain and entertain Macbeth as they show themselves fluent in the dangerous riddles, half lies, and double meanings inherent in some kinds of poetic utterances. The play’s exotic, pyrotechnic witchcraft brings to the foreground the covert menace of a conventional pastourelle’s cross-gendered and cross-classed sexual affairs.

Furthermore, pastoral’s preoccupation with the backward glance is inverted by this play’s underlying interest in political forecast or royal succession through these
seeds of time or “nature’s germens” that will grow into flourishing institutions (the
churches and the castles supported by an agrarian economy that Macbeth volunteers to
sacrifice in Act V) as long as the royal bloodline stays intact. Prematurely splitting open
these seeds of time in prophecy dangerously collapses the future and the present, but it
is Macduff’s knowledge of season that imposes order on time and satisfies Scotland’s
succession crisis. The seasonal lexicon’s acknowledgement of nature’s constant change
clashes with the stoic course of action (in effect, play-acting) that Macbeth must maintain
in order to usurp Duncan’s throne and spill the King’s “golden blood” (II.iii.110). In this
play, Macduff, a counselor who survives all seasons, eventually stabilizes monarchical
succession from cataclysmic signs, from unruly witchcraft, from air-drawn daggers, and
from overzealous ambition – all Marlovian theatrical tropes. Read as a device that
unveils the paradox of stability expressed as constant change, Macbeth’s deployment of
pastoral is neither Queen Elizabeth’s refusal to age in her mask of eternal Spring, nor
does it insist on the mindless festive mentality associated with the greenworld comedy
first given precedence by the literary critic C.L. Barber in 1959: merriment, holiday,
cakes, and ale. Wonder combined with this modified pastoral as the constancy of
orderly change is of central importance to Shakespeare’s early Stuart vision of the
possibilities of a post-Golden Age political jurisprudence.

On one hand, to argue that pastoral matters to Macbeth will require an innovative
way of thinking about an old form. As Putnam observes, “the pastoral is a form of song
which ideally should maintain a course free from the ‘strain’ of foreign elements and remain the offspring of a remote world, delicate and aloof from the violence of conscious suffering.” On the other hand, we have seen how violence and intemperance have always pertained to pastoral’s structural need to contrast with epic and to propel a poetic career toward epic. With Macbeth, from the first scene’s unseaming “from the nave to th’ chaps” to the final scene’s beheading, Shakespeare writes a bloody play about a “bloody man,” Bellona’s bridegroom, who dedicates himself to usurpation and sedition (I.ii.22, 1). In its effort to seek a “complementary union of setting and spirit,” Macbeth relies on nocturnal themes: androgynous witches, cannibalizing horses, and a “feverous earth that did shake” (II.iii.59). During most of the play the expectation of diurnal rhythm completely disappears. Nonetheless, it is because Shakespeare

Putnam, p. 345.

Putnam, p. 349. Part of the conflict here is simply the discrepancy between what Putnam or any literary critic believes that pastoral “ideally should” do as opposed to what pastoral does. True, genre study can employ circular reasoning where theories propose solutions that grow wholecloth from the terms and conditions of the theories. Yet my call to develop an innovative approach to formal analysis (to consider a Virgilian form’s relationship to tragic plays, for example) reflects a broader need to see how writers in Renaissance England turned to literary form (such as pastoral) and their concurrent lexicons to frame a sovereign’s tenure in relationship to the passing of normative, “natural” time, and to do so in an accessible language. Pastoral is ideal for this examination since one key feature of the form in the Theocritian tradition is a homogenous climate that early moderns also label pre-lapsarian. The seasonal lexicon narrates – overtly or covertly – developing succession crises in Shakespeare’s plays, but the lexicon also frames (that is, imposes order on) the partially controllable course of developing romantic intrigues, ages of life, terms of office, etc. Tension between individual agency and a providential force as inscrutable and benign as the arrival of summer or winter offers proof that a human history – even that of Queen Elizabeth – requires an environmental history.
summons and dismisses key pastoral artifacts at critical moments that we are able to discern that the Macbeths reign in a resolutely fallen world. We realize this in the play’s first scene where stage directions call for thunder and lightning. Our attention is drawn to the three witches who “hover through the fog and filthy air” of a wilderness rather than an unobtrusive, healthy climate (I.i.13). And it is Duncan and Banquo’s complete misperception of the clean air, a primary indicator of a pastoral environment, at Inverness Castle during their royal progress that contributes to their downfall.

Furthermore, because the audience has just seen Lady Macbeth unsex herself it knows a truth that Duncan does not. This dramatic irony makes the King’s error of judgment all the more apparent.  

“The air // nimbly and sweet recommends itself,” Duncan unwisely observes, “unto our gentle senses” (I.vi.1 – 3). When Banquo agrees with the King’s assertion (“I have observed // the air is delicate”) and adds that the “guest of summer,” the “temple-haunting martlet,” approves and sojourns at Inverness, Shakespeare alludes to an ancient ritual of hospitality determined by the calendar (I.vi.3 – 10). As E.K. Chambers explains,

[T]he custom of the progress...led the Court summer by summer to remove from London and the great palaces on the Thames and renew the migratory life of earlier dynasties, wandering for a month or more over the fair

45 Duncan misreads the treacherous Thane of Cawdor in Act I and brushes aside his mistake: “there’s no art,” he claims, “to find the mind’s construction in the face” (I.iv.11 – 12). This dismissal of any correlation between inner and outer seems to teach skepticism, but Duncan continues to believe exactly what he sees or see what he wants to believe. This kind of blind faith does not belong in a degenerate age, nor would it ever be reasonable behavior for a sovereign.
face of the land...this was a holiday, in which the sovereign sought change of air and the recreation of hunting and other pastimes as the country yields.46

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare summons but dismisses this historical asylum in the sovereign’s royal progress, when the King re-created himself as a shepherd among his devoted flock in the countryside. By the next day, the saintly Duncan, a “guest of summer” who joins the temple-haunting martlet, is dead. Banquo’s poignant words on the martlet, Duncan and Lady Macbeth’s courteous, yet ironic exchange over the fellowship between guest and host, and the failed banquet in Act III contribute to the demise of summer and the clean, hopeful climate associated with pastoral in *Macbeth*.

Summer dies with Duncan, but so does the hope of Spring and the possibility of cyclical rebirth contained in a vernal lexicon. In Act II, after observing that “this place is too cold for hell,” the porter begins a digression on sin and divine punishment that ends with the transpired hope “to let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to th’ everlasting bonfire” (II.iii.15 – 17). As he offers this grim joke about the “primrose path” – a colloquialism which refers to the lethal pursuit of pleasure, from *prima rosa*: the “first rose” of Spring – in conjunction with eternal damnation, the porter converts a common symbol of the celebratory pastoral *ethos* (the lightness inspired by a “gather ye roses” refrain) into a lethal error along the lines of fraud, equivocation and the English

The primrose path, according to the hell’s gate porter, is the dissembling path that cuts corners and ends in a lyric moment that lasts forever – in hell. Unlike the vision of the primrose in Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* (1593), where Venus reclines on a “primrose bank” as she seduces Adonis, the Macbeths’ primrose way (i.e. the quick and easy way) toward new titles and Scotland’s throne climaxes in a dread or heaviness that the Renaissance associates with guilt. This spiritual and somatic heaviness, whose victims are “troubled with thick-coming fancies,” causes nightwalking, lethargy, and deep internal imbalance; Lady Macbeth dies and presumably goes to hell for these very symptoms (V.iii.40). The deceptively appealing primrose path – construed as ethically dubious and economically fraudulent activity – has serious consequences in a Christian worldview where irresponsibility and self-indulgence potentially led to damnation.

In contrast, the primrose path signifies something entirely different according to the terms and conditions of late sixteenth-century pastoral. Then, a journey into the countryside – erotic, contemplative, or both – could conceal the noble pursuit of cultivating interiority through letters and close contact with the Muses. When Shakespeare uses a nearly identical expression (“primrose bank”) in 1593 in *Venus and Adonis* (1593), where Venus reclines on a “primrose bank” as she seduces Adonis, the Macbeths’ primrose way (i.e. the quick and easy way) toward new titles and Scotland’s throne climaxes in a dread or heaviness that the Renaissance associates with guilt. This spiritual and somatic heaviness, whose victims are “troubled with thick-coming fancies,” causes nightwalking, lethargy, and deep internal imbalance; Lady Macbeth dies and presumably goes to hell for these very symptoms (V.iii.40). The deceptively appealing primrose path – construed as ethically dubious and economically fraudulent activity – has serious consequences in a Christian worldview where irresponsibility and self-indulgence potentially led to damnation.

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47 Also, see Ophelia’s admonition to her brother Laertes in *Hamlet* (1600): “Do not as some ungracious pastors do, // show me the steep and thorny way to heaven, // whiles like a puffed and reckless libertine // himself the primrose path of dalliance treads” (I.iii.46 – 49).

Adonis, his pastoral poem that he grafts with Petrarchan love poetry, he insists that the drive to seize the day in the pursuit of pleasure at all costs deifies lovers who renounce all else but the self and the beloved. Venus argues that the “forceless flowers” of the primrose bank support her body “like sturdy trees” despite the roses’ fragility, just as two “strengthless doves” draw her carriage: “love is a spirit all compact of fire, // not gross to sink, but light, and will aspire” (152, 149 – 150). Because love is composed of light, airy spirits, Adonis ought to agree that Venus’s sexual overtures are humorally beneficial to the embodied soul. Love’s levity, she suggests, increases its value, as does the fact that this instance of eroticism is non-conjugal; she is, in fact, married to another. Because she does not restrain Adonis by marriage, Shakespeare implies that this particular primrose union transcends the court since during the sixteenth century Elizabeth decided, or at the very least approved, all marriage alliances among the nobility. In Venus’s argument, the non-binding pastoral dalliance epitomized by Christopher Marlowe’s classic plea to “Come live with mee, and be my love” (the “gather ye roses” refrain) actually refines men and woman. Those who have the

49 Admittedly, Venus nearly suffocates Adonis and many critics argue that she embodies a predatory, maternal love and/or lust. Taken out of context, her rational arguments for love correspond to tenets of Renaissance humanism. Shakespeare’s joke depends on this misalignment. Furthermore, the patronage economy within which Shakespeare wrote this text (and Lucrece, 1594) required that poets adjudicate between their patron (in this case, Southampton) and the ultimate authority of the realm, Queen Elizabeth.

courage to risk social castigation and escape to healthy Arcadian spaces to take an illicit lover or to write poetry dare to exercise liberty, for they defy authority of contract and Queen.

Far from being a wanton or inconsequential pastime, passion and the lyric that it inspires may ask deep political questions while disguised as loose, erotic rhyme. For example, the hedonist undertones of *Venus and Adonis* question what makes men and women human. What, then, is the relationship of erotic rebels to the state that must approve marital unions? Indeed the hidden meanings of particular erotic alliances formed the basis of Sir Philip Sidney’s *Old Arcadia* in 1580. In 1575, George Gascoigne acknowledges the paradox of the heaviness of light, erotic verse when he openly discredits his “posies and rymes” by calling them “madde follies committted in grene youth” but publishes them nonetheless.\(^1\) Gascoigne hopes that readers can extract a
evidence of the thriving “gather ye roses” industry, see also Sir Walter Raleigh’s response (“The Nymph’s Reply”) and that of John Donne, “The Bait.” Marlowe’s swain refuses to accede to any utilitarian principles in his proposal to the nymph; he will neither plan in advance nor commit to acquire property – his desire is escape rather than marriage. Raleigh’s nymph insists that Spring’s economy (blossoming flowers, fruits, and growth of any kind) matters differently for women for whom the burden of sexual and social reproduction remains despite the shepherd’s seductive fantasy of the simple life.

didactic use value from his “madde follies,” or so he says. In *Venus and Adonis*, sport and love eventually turn tragic, for Adonis dies during the hunt, while Venus curses earthly love and retreats to the sky in immaculate grief. One feels that if she had been successful, Venus would have temporarily recreated the Golden Age on earth – a celestial motive that justifies her aggressive hunt for Adonis. Yet in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare prevents even a moment when a May-morning or bed of roses appears to either distract (when viewed negatively) or restore (when viewed positively) the body politic. Regicide is the primrose path, and by 1606 the vernal pastoral of 1593 is meaningless.52

The scandalous absence of Lady Macbeth’s children, since sexual activity and pregnancy are commonly associated with Spring, reinforces pastoral’s obsolescence and contributes to the text’s succession crisis since no offspring are available to redeem the land. The omission of children is the focal point of a well-known New Critic debate between A.C. Bradley and L.C. Knights, whose 1964 response to Bradley in “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?” suggests that the very question of children is irrelevant.53

52 According to James Shapiro, evidence from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* shows that 1599 marks the terminus of simple and pure *carpe diem* poetry: “The line [“Dead Shepherd, now I find thy saw of might”] recalls the time back then in the early 1590’s when he was working on *Venus and Adonis* and Marlowe on *Hero and Leander*. Poetry would never be quite so simple or pure as that again.” In *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare, 1599*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), p. 217.

Knights parodies the previous generation of literary critics by arguing that long, spurious investigations of the pre-histories of Shakespeare’s characters are effectively worthless when compared to the factual, results-driven analyses of Shakespeare’s use of language. But Lady Macbeth’s hypothetical infanticide (see, for example, her speech which begins with “I have given suck” in I.vii.54 – 59) matters for both students of language and genre, even when a new generation of critics such as Cheney subdivide Shakespeare’s generic influences between Spenser (pastoral/epic) and Marlowe (Ovid/theater), among others. By considering Lady Macbeth’s sterility or Macduff’s parthogenesis in relationship to absent or exploited pastoral conventions, we can study how Shakespeare separates the seasonal lexicon from Spenserian / Virgilian modes and begins to redefine what constitutes acceptable environmental encounters in the early Stuart era. To suggest that language cues genre, which in turn determines narrative choices such as Lady Macbeth’s maternal inclination and Scotland’s ongoing succession crisis, reconciles Bradley and Knights’s disparate positions and shows them to be a false opposition. For example, Macbeth’s Machiavellian politics are circumscribed by the porter’s subversive use of the pastoral expression “primrose way,” where the garden of

earthly delights leads to eternity in hell. To believe in the optimism and stability of the old pastoral matrix is to be as duped as Duncan, whose assessment of Inverness’s climate proved to be a lethal mistake. Lady Macduff says as much to her son, the text’s most innocent victim, whose desire to live “as birds do” in the fields is offset by his mother’s experience of nets, birdlime, and traps in the “earthly world” (IV.ii.33, 75). Even migrating birds cannot cue the arrival of a procreative Spring and the refuge that this season signifies in the fallen world.  

Though it obviously lacks the structural motifs of festivity or fruitful bower featured in erotic verse or the setting of a comedy, two different green remedies in Macbeth supplement the obvious lacunae of summer and Spring and restore the royal line. These green remedies have a complicated relationship to the traditions of pastoral ecology explained above, but, as I will argue, Shakespeare uses them to achieve the same results. First, the greenworld wonder represented by the uprooted, moving grove of Birnam Wood terrifies the usurpers and provides a generous “leafy screen” to conceal Edward the Confessor’s invading army (V.vi.1). Although the audience foresees the

54 In the Golden Age, springtime lasted all year according to Ovid. As Arthur Golding translates, “Zephyr with his mild // and gentle blast did cherish things that grew of own accord. // The ground, untilled, all kinds of fruits did plenteously afford” (I.122 – 124). All four seasons only developed during the Brass Age. Understandably, whether or not these new three seasons (summer, fall, and winter) were natural – that is, part of nature – or a result of the degenerative activities of human kind informed early modern discussions of seasonal alteration. In other words, was winter always punitive? As Paul Alpers writes, “in Christian thought ideas of humility are connected with the curse of labor,” thus the tendency also to mix georgic and pastoral in late Shakespearean discussions of the natural. Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Arthur Golding, trans. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 2001) and Alpers, p. 460.
logical explanation, the forest’s perambulation is an unnatural, wondrous event for Macbeth to witness. It is an event suitable to epic poetry. As such, replete with innovation and surprise, the wandering grove is again seemingly unrelated to the fixed life of a pastoral shepherd whose anonymity depends on an unremarkable environment. Shakespeare’s Henry VI knew that his only pastoral experiences would be mundane: as a shepherd, he would sit on a hill while sporting, resting, and caring for his flock. Fearless and immune to either a corrupt court climate or the defects of nature, the shepherd-king seeks an environment of passivity and timelessness that literalizes his superior, two-bodied status given credence by the tenets of Renaissance legal and natural-philosophical ideas and beliefs.

Eschewing this plain constancy, on the eve of war Macbeth finds reprieve by imagining that he lives life as an actor, a “poor player // that struts and frets his hour upon the stage” – not a shepherd (V.v.24 – 25). Through this theater metaphor, Shakespeare aligns Macbeth with other self-proclaimed player-kings such as Henry V, Richard III, or Hamlet, rather than pastoral kings such as Henry VI or Macbeth’s own Duncan. The possibilities of these alternative trades, shepherd-poet or play-actor, briefly divert someone who dreams or watches a play from the vicissitudes of his own

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53 To be fair, Macbeth also imagines that life is “a tale // told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, // signifying nothing” (V.v.26 – 28). Because Macbeth dismisses both theater and literature as semantically non-signifying, he dispenses with poesis (pastoral self-reflection and knowledge gained from private retreat) and scientia (knowledge that stems from contact with the external world and its unknown wonders). In these lines, no form of knowledge alleviates the terror of usurpation and regicide.
life, as Shakespeare suggests that real Kings delude themselves with pastoral fantasy during hardships while tormented usurpers and stage Machiavels like Macbeth (and Richard III) argue that every form of selfhood – public or private, expressed or hidden – is mere acting. As Katherine Eisaman Maus describes Hamlet’s own conclusion about his theatricalized exteriority, “the frank fakeries of the playhouse, its disguisings and impersonations, stand for the opacities that seem to characterize all relations of human beings to one another.”

Never quite released from his subordination to his first lie, Macbeth dissembles to himself and to everyone around him until Birnam Wood moves toward him and he recklessly embraces a tragic fate. Through both pastoral and pageantry Shakespeare articulates two forms of sovereign self-awareness that merge with Cheney’s exploration of the stage/page creative hybridity of Marlowe and Spenser. In each configuration of selfhood, the enigma of the two-bodied monarch presents a unique example of the decisions and activities available to the wider race of humankind – the impulse to feign inner and outer (to theatricalize) or the impulse to carelessly or courageously abdicate responsibility for a spell in the countryside (to pasteurize).

Macbeth’s unedifying and sinister country ramble on the “blasted heath” forces him to

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theatricalize, although because he usurps the throne the play’s spectacles work against him.

A significant difference between royals who choose to shepherd and royals who choose to act lies in the imaginary theaters that they require. Ideally, pastoral dramatizes how equilibrium of environment and self is achieved only by satisfied expectations and tempered affect that leaves little to chance. Pastoral is the lull in action required for isolated speakers to craft or frame amorous poesis, to engage in rhetorical debates, or to ponder life’s conflicts. It also signifies the requisite alienation and withdrawal necessary to begin a poetic career modeled after that of Virgil or Spenser, alias “Colin Clout.” In countless pastoral scenes, shepherds roam freely enough in the outdoors, but the solitude of the profession ultimately limits their availability to engage in politics and epic warfare. Furthermore, the culture of pastoral is the appropriate (yet out of reach) legal-philosophical locus or green habitat for a sovereign whose metaphysical incarnation of the body politic allows him to transcend time, passion, and the defects of seasonal change. Conversely, monarchs who describe themselves in terms of playacting glean from the culture of the Renaissance spectacle, where sudden appearances, timed entrances and exits, and vividly (and occasionally unusually) costumed actors invite comparison with the language of Christian and aesthetic wonder. Theater historians note that during the first decades of the seventeenth century England adapted continental methods of movable scenery, stage perspectives, lavish costumes,
and innovative lighting effects, thus increasing the number of wonders seen at the theater. Even for a sovereign, a Renaissance wonder – defined with remarkable variation in the period as a monstrous birth, the unicorn’s horn, an annual fair, or the artisanship on the nave of a cathedral – is unfamiliar and potentially unsettling. As an object and as a passion, a wonder marked the edge of the known and the unknown. It also depended on a unique epistemic and passionate reaction from spectators who feel but do not know what they see. As a result, an appearance of a wonder denotes a performance in a newly created, contingent public space which, as Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park write, “commanded attention.” As such, wonders were able to arrest and to astonish even the highest secular authority of the realm through their capability to display but not fully uncover the dark, illegible, and occult power of the natural, supernatural, and preternatural world(s). This temporary astonishment proved that the monarch’s body natural – like that of his or her subjects – lived under the weather: earthquakes, storms, floods, ice storms, and distempered seasons such as warm winters and cold summers led to moments of a sovereign’s humility.

59 Daston and Park, p. 172.
60 Court flattery led to descriptions of monarchs who magically transcend atmospheric wonders. From the historian Raphael Holinshed, 1586, to Elizabeth: “After all the stormie, tempestuous,
These two structures, an orderly pastoral environment and an anomalous wonder, repeatedly come to a head in *Macbeth.* For example, “can such things be,” Macbeth asks after a visitation by Banquo’s ghost, “and overcome us like a summer’s cloud // without our special wonder?” (III.iv.111 – 113). Hugely frustrating and impossible to stage-direct, the unnatural appearance of a dead man dispels a secure season like a sudden rain cloud, though Banquo’s appearance is only unnatural to Macbeth who reverses nature when he murders his friends and the King. Because nothing mortal and therefore nothing known could “impress the forest, [and] bid the tree // unfix his earthbound root” to advance the interests of a particular monarch and decide the outcome of a battle, Macbeth again assumes that such a thing cannot be (IV.i.117 – 118). Yet by substituting branches for roots this is precisely what occurs.

and blustering windie weather of queene Marie was overblowne, the darksome clouds of discomfort dispersed, the palpable fogs and mists of most intolerable miserie consumed, and the dashing showers of persecution overpast: it pleased God to send England a calme and quiet season, a cleare and lovely sunshine, a quitsett from former broiles of a turbulent estate, and a world of blessings by good queene Elizabeth.” qtd. in Schmidgall, p. 157.

### Footnote
61 See also Horatio’s comment to Hamlet before he first delivers news of the ghost:

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<th>Comment</th>
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<td>Season your admiration for a while</td>
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<td>With an attendant ear till I may deliver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upon the witness of these gentlemen</td>
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<tr>
<td>This marvel to you. (I.i.192-195)</td>
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Horatio’s imperative to Hamlet to “season” his admiration does not stress the word’s connotation with time, when “season” refers to either an indefinite period or a specific, defining moment. Rather, Horatio asks Hamlet to govern his reaction to this news by forestalling doubt and suspending disbelief based on the authority of collective observation.
Birnam Wood’s wondrous mobility achieves the same magical, anti-realist consequences as does an Arcadian escape. Ironically, in *Macbeth*, a green wonder was the reverse of a secure pastoral landscape and its narrative traditions, but it was able to do the work of furthering pastoral goals for the alert and ready spectator community and for the rightful heirs: when the forest moves, the royal line transcends time, the body politic unites, and a modicum of civic harmony returns to the bloody world of the Scotch. Wonder enables the return of a Golden Age – or, at least, a world with a legitimate sovereign – by protecting the crown’s bloodline.

In the plays of the early seventeenth century, wonder did not entirely replace the hegemony of pastoral, but it became as versatile, fictive, and compromised a solution to tenets involving sovereignty and time as did Golden Age nostos. After 1603 early moderns continued to write stories about Kings and Queens who reassess their relationships to the state and to one another while sequestered in the greenworld, but cultural texts from the era collaborate with King James’s (known as Great Britain’s “Solomon”) scholarly interest in the occult and natural philosophy. Possibly to contain the fear and the challenges that it represented to all subjects, wonder took a new role as a form of entertainment: it appears in theater – or, it could be read as theater – in the immensely popular travel tales that narrate encounters with the unknown, and in the international market run by gentlemen who collected nature’s marvels for curiosity cabinets. There arose a need to traffic in wonder(s) and impose order from a centralized
bureaucracy that could profit from wondrous commodities and sort out the true from the false.\textsuperscript{62} By the time Descartes ranks the passions of the soul in 1649, he makes “to wonder” his first priority, thereby inaugurating its importance for the seventeenth century and beyond.

In Descartes’s technical vocabulary, this passion signifies a person’s first encounter with an unknown object (which also could be called a “wonder”) that surprises him or her and upsets a prior determination about the world. Because wonder causes men to “be astonished” but also to seek an empirical solution, it actually shares a second trait of the pastoral, where isolation in the countryside creates time for the intellectual labor seen in contemplating selfhood and crafting verse.\textsuperscript{63} Importantly, pastoral and wonder both narrate epistemic occasions that rely on staged encounters with particular green environments: the joyful land of Arcadia and the definitively (if not temporarily) anomalous Birnam Wood, Prospero’s tempest, or Albion’s storm-

\textsuperscript{62} For a discussion of the vast and quite complicated networks of science and trade at the street-level of London, see Deborah Harkness’s \textit{The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution}. (New Haven: Yale U P, 2007). Harkness, like many historians of science, seeks to upset the teleological narrative of Renaissance science that supports a top-down imposition of ideas, order, power, and progress from Francis Bacon outward. Harkness’s constructivist position toward knowledge of the natural world is one that values the contributions of artisans, merchants, and amateurs in England and from among its popular culture. For one of the first arguments of this kind, see Pamela O. Long’s reading of sixteenth-century metallurgy, “The Openess of Knowledge: An Ideal and Its Context in 16th-Century Writings on Mining and Metallurgy.” \textit{Science and Technology} (32) 1991: 318-355. Long suggests that the “endorsement of openess in the natural sciences” began in the sixteenth century. See Long, p. 318.

wracked heath. But a crucial distinction between the two concepts remains. In the mid-
seventeenth century, wonder branches off toward scientia while pastoral continues to
lead to poesis. The disparate paths that pastoral and wonder use to advance knowledge
claims could be mapped on to the classic epistemic division between the arts and the
sciences, the embellished and the honest, and the metaphysical and the factual.64

Yet in 1606, such distinctions did not yet profit from institutional backing.

Wondrous, inexplicable events could propel fact-finding quests motivated by Cartesian
wonder or inspire surrender to a providential force that is greater than the self. In the
latter case, wonder led an observer to abandon epistemology in order to rely on faith
alone. It was not yet possible to say that one solution to a succession crisis affirmed the
importance of metaphysics over that of rational deliberation since nature flooded both
categories.65 In Macbeth, Shakespeare aids the state in one last, particularly

64 For a challenge to this position, see Rayna Kalas’s Frame, Glass, Verse. Kalas argues that to write
poetry (from the view of the English Renaissance) required technical craftsmanship not unlike
manual skills such as glassmaking. Giving precedence to the creative aspects of techne, Kalas
claims that poesy is a trade. Frame, Glass, Verse. (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 2007). See especially
chapters 4 and 5. Nonetheless, the assertion that wonder generates passion for scientia (L. “to
know”) which can be cultivated by an experimental philosophy that was institutionalized with
increasingly homogenous witnesses or audiences, theaters, and object-actors (specimens,
machines, organic matter) in England (and parts of continental Europe) in the seventeenth
century has been demonstrated with aplomb by Science Studies. See Steven Shapin The Social
History of Truth (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994), Shapin and Simon Schaffer Leviathan and the Air-

65 And my point on periodization is that the “natural” floods both categories in modernity as well.
environmental way: plain knowledge of season, if it could not transcend atmospheric wonders, could at the very least recognize the vagaries of climate change in order to organize the vagaries of social and political change, including royal succession: in Macbeth, it is Macduff who “is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows // the fits o’ th’ season” (IV.ii.16 – 17). Knowledge of season, which neither immerses royals in the obsolete dream of ver perpetuum nor sporadically violates all calendar months, exists side by side the play’s polarized politics of nature as seen in the weathered pastoral of Duncan and the volatile theater of the Macbeths. “Untimely ripped” from nature, Macduff clearly manages time in the same way that a calendar (a cultural edifice created by three partially incommensurable measurements: solar, lunar, and sidereal) stabilizes the ongoing relationships between social practices and natural phenomena by regulating cycles of time. (V.viii.16). Time management is the virtue of all Shakespeare’s stage-directors and wise counselors – from Camillo, Paulina, Ariel, and Lear’s Kent to Portia and Rosalind. Armed with seasonal decorum and the georgic propensities valued by Stuart poetics, Macduff knows who is ripe to fall, which is the weed in the garden, and who “our rarer monsters are” (V.viii.25). Finally, he leads the faction that will “dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds,” beheads Macbeth, and redeems the state, although at the end there are still witches unaccounted for (V.ii.30).

Macbeth, a lord of misrule, splinters any effort to organize the present or to plan for the future. In fact, his only effort to act providentially results in an impotent curse on
the calendar: “let this pernicious hour,” he claims upon seeing Hecate’s line of ghosts, “stand aye accursèd in the calendar” (IV.i.155 – 156). He slays the pastoral King, but he also tries to impose a pernicious hour on the season’s routines that are known so well by Macduff. Finally, although he favors acting, because he is an unabashed usurper all of the play’s dramatic wonders work against him. At a critical moment, as he is faced with the task of understanding why his wife died, wonder’s restorative power fails Macbeth: he loses the ability to surrender to the ministrations of a providential force that is greater than the self or to the sciences whose Doctor will not offer him an epistemology of the diseased mind – as he phrases this rejection, “throw physic to the dogs, I’ll none of it” (V.iii.49). Equally dismissive of a Cartesian or a Christian response to wonder, Macbeth decides to “play the Roman fool” and to essentially die upon his sword as he runs headlong into a suicidal battle (V.viii.1). If he cannot be a King, he will be nothing. Here, Macbeth in his anti-pastourelle may be read as Gallus, whose vulnerability to betrayal, violence, and power’s appeal leads him to reject all of the physic that Arcadia offers. Yet Virgil gently admonishes Gallus as a tragic hero who is constitutionally incapable of saving himself, while Shakespeare punishes his rebel with the tranquil “physic” of death.

*Macbeth* offers proof that the succession crisis occasioned by Duncan’s murder interrupts the flow of time in the natural world with as much guarantee as a King’s wounds signify a “breach in nature” or 1603 flourishes as a protean, climacterical year
(II.iv.111). According to this argument, certain events and practices are definitively natural; others are definitively unnatural. What, then, reverses the play’s uncontested descent into the unnatural? As it pushes aside the unrealistic and outmoded expectations that cue the Golden Age, Macbeth offers a viable early Stuart alternative: a globe-trotting forest and a well-seasoned counselor (Macduff) who is “not born of woman” and whose wife and children are conveniently dead (V.iii.4). Despite these two innovations, it is possible to claim that the play still teaches the Globe audience pastoral’s conservative message: usurpation and regicide oppose nature’s destined course, a course symbolized by Duncan, the King with “golden blood” whose sacredness is reinforced by the miraculous, “success”-ful homecoming (nostos) of his children, Malcolm and Donalbain. This reading offers evidence for the continuity of the pastoral solutions so beloved by the Elizabethan courtly aesthetic. Nonetheless, pastoral’s celebration of all substances that perpetually grow (Spring, flowers, and lovers) ironically will not admit the passage of time, and this refusal, as Raleigh’s “Nymph’s Reply” attests to, makes it extremely obsolete as a tool of pragmatic government. Too much evidence in Macbeth points toward the loss of the integrity or believability of any pastoral, “Hollywood ending” solution to the kingship-related struggles unique to Jacobean England. Time cannot always be considered the enemy, and Duncan needs to become a skeptic. He is too much of an inept magistrate to be considered a hero of the Golden Age. But it is also possible to ascertain from Macbeth an
argument that every succession is unnatural (therefore potentially dangerous) since it always requires the death of one sovereign, thereby defeating the pastoral myth of preservation adapted to support the legal fiction that one of a King’s bodies is unaffected by Time. The reciprocity between a body unaffected by Time and an environment for that body kept shepherds, flowers, fields, and larks, as ridiculous and contrived as they seem today, firmly in the memory of early Stuart artists and intellectuals. Finally, rote biological succession in royal families is also dangerously contra naturam since it also requires the existence of heteromarital comic pairings, which, as I argued in the previous chapter, actually underscore the fear of dissolution in many texts of the period. Thus this first reading that forms discrete categories of the “natural” and the “unnatural” is not suited for this play’s internal complexity.

Moreover, Elizabeth Tudor knew that marriage could dethrone a sitting monarch, and for this reason (among others) she never married. The marital success that produced James Stuart’s two male heirs, Henry and Charles, was at best a pyrrhic victory for the nation since the Stuart household was crucially divided by religion: Henry, the eldest son, entertained the hopes of all of Protestant Europe who gradually invested him with the mythology of a Herculean conqueror. He felt destined to be a warrior for true religion and, according to verse written to commemorate his baptism, to
defeat the “Cerberus of Rome” even as his mother and brother favored Catholicism.66

Why, then, was the Stuart succession in 1603 so successful? In many ways, it was not. In other ways, it was successful because it was unnatural: it grafted two family trees together in a way (non-marital) that undoes our general thinking about families as discreet entities. The Stuart succession also eliminated filial rivals for the throne.

Another way to answer this question is to note competing dispensations allotted to the “natural” during these years and to trace these to thriving or discontinued literary forms as I have done in this chapter. I have argued that Shakespeare tries to replace the Spenserian shepherd king seen in *III Henry VI* with a providential force whose culture of theater and spectacle inevitably supports the legitimate monarch. Yet the extraordinary amount of ambivalence regarding the (un)naturalness of wonder in Jacobean tragedy or on the streets of London, where close scrutiny of the natural world took place on a daily basis, indicates a subtle yet enduring unhappiness not with a particular Queen or King, but with government.

Finally, I have argued that *Macbeth* can be a tragic play not because it understands comedy, but because it understands pastoral’s lie so well: pastoral may generate immortalizing lyric, but it cannot restore all losses nor can it forestall the deaths of particular Kings and Queens. Nor could anyone recreate the biblical world of Eden or

the classical landscapes of Arcadia; Gloriana’s death made this apparent. Shakespeare
knew this, and perhaps for this reason theater intervenes so dramatically in his fullest
exploration of Virgilian pastoral, *The Winter’s Tale* (1611). It cannot be denied that Act
IV’s famous argument *against* art (since gillyflowers are nature’s bastards) takes place in
a robustly pastoral setting (which includes a potentially unruly, infectious cross-class
marriage) while the argument for art, even an art so terrifying that it resurrects the dead,
takes place in an outdoor theater in Sicilia’s court. Nonetheless, Shakespeare twice asks
his audience to suspend their disbelief: once during Time’s speech (“Your patience this
allowing // I turn my glass and give my scene such growing”) and once when the
Hermione-automata begins to move (“resolve you // for more amazement”); why not
ask them to do so by writing a pastoral solution to *The Winter’s Tale’s* succession crisis?67
Yet pastoral does not reunite torn families and blasted friendships, nor does it provide a
safe harbor for Perdita and Florizel. One could also argue that Act IV continues the
play’s trajectory toward doom when Polixenes shatters the sheep-shearing festival and
bars his son from succession: the play does not end on a pastoral note. Only in Act V
does Shakespeare fully demonstrate the value of theater by using it to reach pastoral’s
impossible goals: *nostos*, “cordial comfort,” acknowledged fidelity, and the ability to
conquer time by acknowledging its irrecoverable passage (V.iii.96).

67 (IV.i.15 – 16, V.iii.108 – 109). Consider also Paulina’s lines to her audience: “I like your silence.
It the more // shows off your wonder” (V.iii.24 – 25).
4. “Odd Feeders:” Female Inconstancy and Contract Dissolution in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1621)

4.1 Inward Arcadia

The classical Golden Age celebrated in some versions of Renaissance pastoral relied on creating a land that was immune to seasonal change. An eternal Spring, according to poets from Ovid to Milton, would reaffirm the legendary constancy that was necessary for other relationships, such as those between sovereigns and subjects, wives and husbands, and plants, animals, and the earth’s constitutive elements, to flourish without regard to Time or to conflict. In this pre-fallen world, as Arthur Golding’s 1565 translation of Ovid reads,

The springtime lasted all the year, and Zephyr with his mild
And gentle blast did cherish things that grew of own accord.
The ground, untilled, all kinds of fruit did plenteously afford...
...Then streams ran milk, then streams ran wine; and yellow honey flowed.¹

An endless supply of fruit, milk, wine, and honey complemented a self-governing realm that was devoid of crime and punishment and replete with joy, communion, and *otium*. The apparent turmoil of Spring in these lines – the vitality elicited by streams, breezes, and “all kinds of fruit” – occludes this season’s mastery of death, its usurpation of the three other seasons, and its overall commitment to stasis represented by perpetually ideal weather. Invulnerable to the vicissitude signified by seasonal change, the Golden Age never experienced a crisis of succession.²

In Renaissance England, the theory of the King’s Two Bodies shared the conceptual design of the mythical Golden Age, for the King’s body politic transcended time, passion, old age, and infancy – all defects brought about by a natural order that is subject to seasonal change. The merit of each of these legal fictions, the King’s Two Bodies and the utopian Golden Age, is ecological constancy, or the nexus of stable

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² Some early modern texts describe a struggle between two holidays or two different seasons. In Thomas Nabbes’s masque, *The Spring’s Glory* (1638), Shrovetide criticizes Christmas: “I say, Christmas, you are past due, you are out of the almanac. Resign, resign.” One season, such as that in the Golden Age, would lack this competition. See Laroque, p. 102. Thomas Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (London: Simon Stafford, 1600) stages a pleasant comedy between summer, winter, “ver,” and others who compete for honor and power.
relationships that originates in the climate of an eternal Spring. Ecological constancy and its many literary ties with pastoral’s Golden Age kept a twin-bodied sovereign “as constant as the northern star:” “unshaken[n] of motion” and aloof from the exigencies of calendars and corporeality. From a superior, cosmic distance, he or she could govern judiciously the limbs of the body politic and administer or reform the cycle of feasts and festivals as needed to regulate human interaction with natural phenomena.

Rather than attempt a vast overview of the gradual decline of the pastoral eclogue and the burgeoning of georgic themes in manor house poetry and in Cavalier verse in the early decades of the seventeenth century, my final chapter turns the argument for eternal Spring in a new direction: female inconstancy and contract dissolution in two non-pastoral texts from 1621. Many Jacobean texts attempt to

3 Etymologically, “constantia” is the Latinate form of the Greek word karteria, or “endurance” and “perseverance.” “Constancy” derives from L. constare, to stand firm. In analytic philosophy, constantia refers to “knowledge (or a stable disposition of the soul) relative to what one must endure or not [endure,] or neither [endure or not endure.]” Constancy represents “less a particular virtue than something that colors all of the virtues, driving the hexis quality of representations bound together as knowledge.” See Jacqueline Lagree’s “Constancy and Coherence.” In Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations. Steven K. Strange and Jack Zupko, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2004), pp. 149 – 150.

4 Shakespeare, William. Julius Caesar. (III.i.60, 70). In The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller, eds. (New York: Penguin, 2002). All subsequent references to Shakespeare’s works are to this edition and are cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

5 On the rise of georgic and the retreat of pastoral, see Anthony Low’s The Georgic Revolution. On the relationship between the Stuart court (including James and Charles) and pastoral, see Leah Marcus The Politics of Mirth (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986). Marcus argues that James’s antagonism toward London inspired his desire to restore strength to the countryside, to revive
repudiate contract dissolution by imposing a clinical lexicon of constancy (*OED:* “steadfast, unmoved, resolute”) just as the Golden Age’s evasion of temporality freed its inhabitants from the vicissitude that resides in a seasonal framework. By shifting the governing *ethos* of Arcadia inward, I argue that Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1621) promotes constancy as a normative policy of endurance to glue or to affix the ostensibly erratic passions of women in order to prevent contract dissolution and stabilize succession within families. Of course, on many occasions, fathers and husbands institute heteromarital contracts to keep women and other property captive. The extent to which these literary works question constancy’s value and its naturalness for men, women, or contracts is often reflected in the extraordinary textual ambiguity that they feature.

A good example of the tension between conflicting views of constancy and human nature present during the early seventeenth century appears in John Donne’s festive practices, and to publish the *Book of Sport* (essentially, the rules of leisure practices) in 1618. The growing alienation between London citizens and the crown led many Stuart artists (Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick – the so-called Cavalier Poets) to valorize rural customs, but, as Marcus writes, this comeback had a belated quality: “holiday has to be made to happen” and mirth seems forced. See Marcus, p. 141. Marcus extends C.L. Barber’s argument from 1959: “under James,” Barber writes, “courtiers and their literary spokesmen began to be militant in defending holiday, the king himself intervening to protect the popular pastimes from Puritan repression.” See Barber, p. 17. For a complete formal analysis of pastoral, which still only includes three seventeenth-century authors (Michael Drayton, John Milton, Andrew Marvell), see Sukanta Chaudhuri’s *Renaissance Pastoral and its English Developments* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989).
(1572 – 1631) third elegy, entitled “Change,” a poem that resists compulsory monogamy, a feature of constancy that is particularly relevant for contractarion thought. Donne begins with a routine principle of attraction such as “likeness glues love.” Yet because women cannot be “bound to one man” and live in accordance with a Heraclitian universe, his elegy also affirms the equal need to rupture or dissolve love’s bonds. To Donne, constancy in human relationships is fleeting: amity may turn into enmity and similarities become differences, since the likenesses that fix and strengthen love remain susceptible to the ever-present force of mutability. Affective ties propelled by nature’s impulse for homonormativity may suture evenly matched lovers and friends, as Donne’s speaker reasons, yet by the same logic love’s bonds will dissolve (or unglue) if resemblances among partners give way to emergent differences. In fact, Donne’s speaker finds more arguments from nature that justify recurrent separations than those that justify perpetual attachment. According to the elegy’s key naturalist truths, lovers separate just as the earth’s constitutive elements and its wild animals seek freedom and achieve vitality through uninhibited motion. It is constancy that alienates men and women with Galenic bodies from a natural world that teems with change.

What follows is an argument for affective inconstancy and contract dissolution as pro-social behaviors with deep roots in the greenworld. In the ocean, the ebb and flow of water cultivates life, whereas stagnant water, regardless of its depth or volume, quickly becomes corrupt, or “putrifies.” Seawater is the purest when it “kiss[es] one
bank, and leaving this, // never look[s] back, but the next bank do[es] kiss.” Birds seek liberty in the sky and goats and foxes, known for their lechery, renew their sexual desire as they change partners. Tributary rivers mix into the same, welcoming “vast sea,” and seed corn grows in one “plough-land” even if the landowner changes when one harvest season succeeds the next. By appealing to the joy of shared property and the inevitability of love’s reversals (including images of gathering and separating that both obliterate and reinforce the distinction between partners), Donne’s libertine cosmos justifies the legitimacy of male and female sexual promiscuity, which is one sense of the early modern expression “inconstancy.” To be environmentally conscious, then, the relationships described in this elegy must end and new relationships must begin. Greenworld and sexual “change,” Donne’s speaker concludes, “is the nursery of // music, joy, life and eternity.” As human relationships resemble patterns in the macrocosm, the ability to dissolve a contract or unglue love when necessary – to be inconstant – breeds nothing less than celestial harmony.⁶

⁶ Technically, Donne’s speaker does not recommend either extreme – constancy or mutability – in the mechanics of natural processes or in the ethics of human coupling. He simply imagines humans and non-humans and everything that they do as events that unfold in time. His universe is not static: it is replete with motion, and it is the business of this poem to justify that motion. But perpetual movement in nature does not lead the speaker to advocate a bacchanal approach to human coupling: “to run all countries,” he writes, is a “wild roguery.” As William Rocket observes, “[Donne’s speaker] opts for a mode of sexual conduct...[whose] image is a via media.” The poem’s sense of ecology, which reflects the speaker’s sex drive, charts a middle way between motionlessness (one iteration of constancy) and random motion driven by chance. See Rocket’s “John Donne: The Ethical Argument of Elegy III.” Studies in English Literature. (15) 1975: 57 – 99.
When the speaker of Donne’s poem imagines the possible fate of like-bonded pairs in a world of flux, the results are both positive and innocuous: change simply leads to more change. If one bond dissolves under the aegis of difference, a new bond will form. Because he assumes that a benign providential force acts through nature, Donne’s speaker reasons also that plurality among sexual partners must generate stability and peace rather than the violent, epic-scale dissolution of civilization poised to flood the pastoral communities in Lyly’s *Gallathea* (1583). Flux is not seen as an assault to an idyllic rural life, nor do the natural moments of this poem require a static climate that is unaffected by Time and thus the working year implied by the succession of disparate seasons and their attendant gains and losses. Nor is mutability seen as the gradual decay of a lush, Edenic landscape. Rather, the dynamic environment of “Elegy III” is the nursery of life. By crafting a sexual and intensely vital landscape where “abridgements to sexual freedom are unnatural for being impediments to the primary urges of a world of movement,” Donne seeks to reshape what Raymond Williams has called the “enameled” literary greenworld of his sixteenth-century predecessors with lyric that accurately reflects the relationships of a collectivity or body politic in motion.7

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7 Rocket, p. 65. Ceaseless, yet deliberate change is also Spenser’s vision of the cosmos in The *Mutabilitie Cantos* (1599, 1604), although Spenser is less intent on inventing a sexual mode that mirrors the universe. To transcend the terror of sublunar mutability, Donne’s final lines cue the Renaissance argument that constant change was a form of stasis. As William Rocket observes, the concept that “nothing abides but change” is an idea as old as *The Timaeus*, where “the perpetuity of mundane changes is an analogue of the inalterability of the heavens.” See Rocket, p. 66. Stanley Fish notices the similarities between the “serene beatitude” of Donne’s final lines...
Here, there are no gentlemen-shepherds who enjoy the glories of an aestheticized Spring paradise. In direct opposition to the isolated pastoral lovers of Christopher Marlowe’s “The passionate Sheepheard to his love,” where an erotic journey requires a blind eye to temporality, labor, and sexual reproduction, “Elegy III’s” figurative language for constancy is “captivity.” Although it signifies the privileges of age and immobility in pastoral, in Donne’s poem constancy pushes affective bonds past their native season, where stagnant water, galley slaves, and trapped birds signify the abuse of power and curtailed freedom. Luckily, nature charts a course that allows Donne’s speaker to escape the terror and the trap of a life-long *impar coniugium*, and by doing so, to reclaim an interior space based on change.

Nonetheless, “Elegy III’s” urge to define inconstancy as a pragmatic *via media* that reconciles both contract dissolution and daring sexual license through the ecology of a non-Christianized georgic greenworld is unorthodox. Unlike the Christianized georgic, which “synchronize[s] the life of Christ with the progress of the seasons” to anchor man’s spiritual progress in redemptive labor, Donne’s greenworld rejects the

collocation of atonement, purgatory, and the labor calendar. Furthermore, it was more often the case that the changefulness prescribed for good health by Donne’s libertine sexual politics was associated with subversive practices (such as religious apostasy and political treason) since in many discourses inconstant men and women lacked credibility and were seen as devoid of either the ability to self-govern or to be loyal subjects.

Bishop Joseph Hall (1574 – 1656) admonishes the “unconstant man” in 1627 because he is so “transformable into all opinions, manners, [and] qualities” that “what he will be next, as yet he knoweth not; but ere he have wintered his opinion, it will be manifest.” Before the inconstant man tests the credibility of his thoughts or decisions by “wintering” them, he prematurely publishes them. Without a stable internal calendar, he will swear, renounce his oath, and promise once again, for “what he promised, he meant not long enough to make an impression.” The changeable Englishmen that Hall denounces were governed by impressionable emotions in a way that endangered the

8 In an agrarian society calendars primarily exist to organize labor. As Sherman Hawkins observes, “for centuries the months and their labors appeared over and over again in calendars and books of hours, above the portals of cathedrals, in handbooks and encyclopedias, signifying that the divisions of time—winter and summer, seedtime and harvest, days and years—are part of the divine plan, and that by labor man works out his own place in it” (88). In Hawkins’s view, the stabilizing cycle of months felt reassuring to early moderns rather than threatening. See “Mutabilitie and the Cycle of the Months.” In Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser. (New York and London: Columbia U P, 1961), p. 91.

commonwealth and created an anxious basis for a social order that (in theory) relied on a static configuration of hierarchy, lasting credibility, and trust among the elite.\(^{10}\)

Unsurprisingly, many early modern writers criticize female inconstancy. Wives in particular were frequently seen as unruly as the weather: they were capricious, unsteady, and as the Elizabethan marriage homily read, “weak creature[s], not endued with the like strength and constancy of mind…sooner disquieted,” and “more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind.”\(^{11}\) From the pulpit to the theater, wives were compared unfavorably with erratic, dynamic, and, consequently, unstable environments. In *As You Like It* (1599?), Rosalind (as Ganymede) explains to Orlando that he must expect giddiness, newfangledness, and emotional *alteratio* from his young wife because

> men are April when they woo, December when they wed. Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives. I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more newfangled than an ape, more giddy in my desire than a monkey. I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to sleep. (IV.i.137 – 146)

Provocatively, Rosalind cannot name a sequential month to describe the living conditions of a married woman. Unlike men, whose affect follows seasonal decorum


between an “April” or a “December” sense of selfhood, women defy normative weather patterns and alarmingly begin to author alternative calendars – ironically, after they marry, when one expects to find them the least powerful. Astrologically unfixed as wives, women begin to act like creatures and thus lose the sense of selfhood that constitutes a precondition for holding a bond, or even an idea, over time. Furthermore, Rosalind’s lines reveal the double standard that is essential to an accusation of female inconstancy: wives, whose capacity for reason is considered less legitimate, are more likely to be charged with inconstancy in emotional display, marital fidelity, or decision-making, whereas husbands are comfortably beyond reproof. To anxious husbands in a patriarchal society, it does no harm to see wives as decreasingly capable of self-government and thus dependent upon their male superiors. Yet by gladly perpetuating the stereotype of female inconstancy, husbands reinforce the power of the “hot, wily and

12 As Joan Gibson notes, for women to be seen as “rational autonomous thinkers” they had to confront the entanglement between reason and chastity, or a “woman’s alleged sexual instability and her lack of rationality.” An alternate vision of the history of philosophy would include early modern women (such as Sor Juana de la Cruz and Luisa Sigea) who assert a claim to rationality by reasoning about chastity. See Gibson’s “The Logic of Chastity: Women, Sex, and the History of Philosophy in the Early Modern Period.” (*Hypatia* (21) 2006), pp. 1-18. In her discussion of women in tragedy, Dympna Callaghan assumes also that women must be unstable: “the problem with the category of woman is in keeping it in its place and out of the ideal order…In tragedy there is a constant reiteration of misogynistic discourse which ‘fixes’ women in conceptual terms and yet, paradoxically, fixes them as unstable.” See Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy. (Hernel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 109. For a Victorian analogue, see Elaine Showalter’s Hystories (New York: Columbia U P, 1997). Showalter argues that “hysteria” is a term used to denigrate female political discontent. Hysteria’s symptoms resemble those of early modern inconstancy.
wild” wives with whom they are contracted to expose them as cuckolds.\textsuperscript{13} Inconstancy thus poses ineluctable conflicts for succession within families in early modern England and as a gendered pandemic, it renames old fears: rebellion and disorder.

As a result of this primarily male dilemma – the paradoxical injunction to stay constant to inconstancy – Katherine Rowe has recently argued that some dramatists from the early Stuart era questioned the viability of marital contracts and, more broadly, doubted “the success of any obligation or debt extended through time.”\textsuperscript{14} Seen as inherently shifting and unruly, female sexual desire (fairly acceptable during Elizabeth’s reign) tended to be censured and to be punished by Jacobean authors, who unlike Donne, freely gave examples of women’s aberrant emotional transformations, or alteratio, as the forerunners to sexual crimes in dramas of contract. Because capricious women lacked credibility, they rendered inadequate contractual agreements such as marriage that depended on the “capacity to predict and track affective ties” over time.\textsuperscript{15} If constancy denies contingency and temporality in support of contracts, then the conservative pastoral impulse with which constancy is associated (i.e. the opposite of “Elegy III”) could not be more remote from the chaos of urban melodrama or courtly tragedy in the

\textsuperscript{13} Donne, “Elegy III,” line 12.

\textsuperscript{14} Rowe, Katherine. “Inconstancy: Changeable Affections in Stuart Dramas of Contract.” In Environment and Embodiment, Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett Sullivan, eds. (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 91. Rowe identifies others who were liminal subjects of contract: youths, effeminate Englishmen, and members of the working-class.

\textsuperscript{15} Rowe, p. 90.
texts that Rowe discusses: plays of Webster, Chapman, and even late Shakespeare. These plays, set in castles and towns, are not generically pastoral and there is no visible greenworld, yet the ubiquity of the female in/constancy lexicon and this disease’s symptoms, marital infidelity, hints at growing displeasure with a static view of contract supported by pastoral and the Golden Age.

I first address Rowe’s argument by identifying how the changeable affections of an adulteress, Beatrice Johanna, dissolve two marriage contracts in another early Stuart tragedy, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1621). But I also complicate Rowe’s reading when I distinguish between Beatrice Johanna’s equivocal desire for an “ominous, ill-faced fellow,” De Flores, and her tendency to shift from one nobleman (Alonzo) to the next (Alsemero) – a sign of the inconstancy that is a trademark of her daily life.16 Ironically, *The Changeling’s* greatest scandal (Beatrice Johanna’s subversive, cross-class desire for De Flores) occludes an even greater scandal: that nature’s most constant bond is its most unlikely. I review a set of solutions that were once promoted by critics to the baffling problem of Beatrice Johanna’s relationship with De Flores, concluding with the argument that appeals to human nature through some combination of the Galenic body and the Stoic mind are incomplete unless they consider the uneven power dynamics at play. I support this by suggesting that the oblique

reference to Lipsius’ neo-Stoic *de constantia* (1594, trans. Sir John Stradling) in the subplot exposes how any theory that denies the body and its appetites ultimately fails as a disciplining technology for wives, daughters, and Bedlam patients.

### 4.2 Constancy: Nature’s “frequent frailty”

According to *The Changeling*’s skeptical outlook on marital fidelity, all women are inconstant to their husbands but “some women” are also “odd feeders” (II.ii.153). As De Flores, the play’s villain, explains, a seemingly fair and virtuous woman may suffer from *alteratio* or she may conceal adultery, but she also may be commanded by “hunger and pleasure” to choose “slovenly dishes,” and “which is stranger, refuse daintier for ‘em” (II.ii.151-2). In a culture saturated with cuckoldry jokes, low expectations for marital fidelity, and little chance for divorce, *The Changeling* subjugates women one step further when it shows how one woman is driven to violate Renaissance decorum and nature’s impulse for homonormativity. This play’s central and most stable relationship forms between two unlike partners: a servant and the master’s fair daughter, Beatrice Johanna. The servant (suggestively named “De Flores:” the deflowerer) self-identifies as a “slovenly” dish, which according to the *OED* refers to a low or base “knave” or describe any behavior, manner, or attire that is marked by lack of “neatness, care, precision, or thoroughness.” Unlike the “dainty” dish, which tastes delicate, and is “pleasing to the
palate," the slovenly dish rarely appeals to any “feeder,” but especially to noblewomen, whose carnal appetite must not cross classes. As it presses its audience to face two broken marriages and one unequal, yet enduring cross-class affair, *The Changeling* exploits the Renaissance’s fascination with the “*diversitas* of human experience, especially of tastes in food and in sexual positions and partners.”\(^{17}\) Because of its interest in diversity, it is challenging to unearth a coherent position on the nature of desire, so often expressed by this text as “appetite.”

Another reason for this difficulty is the playwrights’ insistence that women who are “odd feeders” defy two sets of expectations (filial obligation and acts of inconstancy) when they reject their self-selected fiancés. The text suggests that a stronger desire than any social, economic, or religious imperative, then, pulls doubly inconstant women toward particular appetites and ultimately causes them to break contracts. Beatrice Johanna quickly rejects her father’s choice for her husband (Alonzo Piracquo) in order to marry Alsemero, a lover she selects “with the eyes of judgement” (II.i.13). “What’s Piracquo,” she asks, who “my father spends his breath for?” (II.i.19 – 20). She thus displays the classic signs of inconstancy that are repeatedly staged by Jacobean

\(^{17}\) Bynum, Caroline Walker. “Presidential Address: Wonder.” *(The American Historical Review* (102) 1997: 1-26), p. 9. In this paper, Bynum distinguishes between Medieval and early modern wonder, but most of her comments apply to either historical period provided that it is pre-Cartesian.
playwrights to decrease female credibility: she breaks one engagement to impulsively marry a new fiancée, and indirectly murders two people in the process.

To reinforce the fact that adultery stems from female inconstancy rather than disobedience, malevolence, or sin, Middleton and Rowley compose a scene in Act II between Alonzo (the first fiancé) and his brother, Tomazo, who doubts Beatrice Johanna’s fidelity with the language of inconstancy:

[TOMAZO]: Come, your faith’s cozened in her, strongly cozened: Unsettle your affection with all speed Wisdom can bring it to; your peace is ruined else. Think what a torment ‘tis to marry one Whose heart is leapt into another’s bosom…

[ALONZO]: You speak as if she loved some other then.

[TOMAZO]: Do you apprehend so slowly?

[ALONZO]: Nay, and that Be your fear only, I am safe enough. Preserve your friendship and your counsel, brother, For times of more distress; I should depart An enemy, a dangerous, deadly one To any but thyself that should but think She knew the meaning of inconstancy, Much less the use and practice… (II.i.127 – 131, 141 – 149)

Buried within this dialogue, Alonzo asserts that a woman whose affections change knows the meaning, use, and practice of inconstancy. In his defense of Beatrice Johanna, Alonzo distinguishes between a priori inconstancy and learned inconstancy, a distinction that Mary Wroth develops also by arguing that women are taught constancy as abject fidelity and that they must unlearn it for their own good. Among all these claims, the looseness of “in/constancy’s” meanings (broken fealty, instability of self, emotional…
alteratio, or sexual crimes) complicates any attempts to find a feminist reading. For example, Alonzo implies that Beatrice Johanna is intuitively constant. Yet by not entertaining the possibility that she could have a reason to change, Alonzo and Tomazo presuppose that Beatrice Johanna (as a woman) lacks legitimate cause to break an engagement that her father has arranged, a belief that is rudimentary to the uneven power dynamics in play.

Nevertheless, as noted above Beatrice Johanna’s aberrant passion cannot be contained by the traditional inconstancy paradigm understood by Alonzo and his brother to encompass the complete range of female desire. Alonzo and Tomazo are unaware of De Flores, who as Beatrice Johanna admits, “more disturbs me // than all my other passions” (II.i.53 – 54). This second category of illegitimate passion is that which propels “odd feeders” to “slovenly dishes” in a bond that is contra naturam: in this particular relationship, Beatrice Johanna is young, beautiful, and fair, and De Flores (whose titles include “basilisk,” “bad face,” and “ominous ill-faced fellow”) is her father’s age, a servant (though he “tumbled into the world a gentleman”) and quite disfigured. But although their love/hate relationship is against nature’s impulse for homonormativity, Beatrice Johanna’s intense bond with De Flores is nonetheless natural and constant. Yet how could this be?
To explain why some desire defies social convention and refutes normativity, Alsemero, the second suitor, declares in Act I that all human beings must accept the particularities of taste:

>This is a frequent frailty in our nature.
>There’s scarce a man amongst a thousand found
>But hath his imperfection: one distastes
>The scent of roses, which to infinities
>Most pleasing is, and odoriferous;
>One oil, the enemy of poison;
>Another wine, the cheerer of the heart
>And lively refresher of the countenance.
>Indeed this fault, if so it be, is general:
>There’s scarce a thing but is both loved and loathed.
>Myself, I must confess, have the same frailty. (I.i.115 – 125)

Alsemero allows that strange taste is a weakness, an “imperfection,” or “frailty,” but then he also excuses it by suggesting that frailty among humans is “frequent,” and, later, “general:” “there’s scarce a thing,” he claims, “but is both loved and loathed.” Thus the ubiquity of odd feeding (what he declares to be a flawed instinct) does nothing more than prove to Alsemero that human nature is flawed; in other words, the ironic conclusion of his speech is that it is natural to be flawed and it is normal to be abnormal. It is also natural to live with these irrational proclivities regardless of gender, for Alsemero suffers from frailty as well. His particular poison is distaste of “a cherry” – as if anything could be more banal (I.i.127).18 Ironically, these minor flaws among

18 Beatrice Johanna ignores the sexual implications of Alsemero’s non sequitur. She moves the conversation in another direction, creating another moment for him to appear inexperienced and pedantic.
individuals sustain greater constancy than do highly mandated contracts. A critical point surfaces from this discussion: Alicante’s community would rather blame nature for their asocial tendencies (dislike of De Flores, dislike of a cherry, dislike of an odiferous rose) than suggest that the social customs that prohibit cross-class desire or that decide the value of material objects are arbitrary (that is, contingent and subject to change rather than absolute) in the first place. If De Flores revolts Beatrice Johanna and then appeals to her, it is nature’s fault – not the system that would make their bond impossible to imagine from the beginning.

By introducing this new perspective on human nature, Middleton and Rowley throw a wrench in an already unstable paradigm regarding female selfhood. Unlike odd feeding, female inconstancy may be managed and may be tested objectively with experiment, as Alsemoro (“the stoic”) travels with a chemistry set that enables him to administer a Chaldean virginity test (I.i.36).¹⁹ (Of course, the virginity test results prove little since Beatrice Johanna outwits her fiancée and mimics the potion’s side effects.) On the other hand, perverse urges, we learn, cannot be approached through rationalist inquiry. Nonetheless, armed with this pedantic lecture on the diversity of taste regarding trivial objects (roses, wine, and olive oil), Alsemoro attempts to defuse the

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¹⁹ Alsemoro is a stoic (historically impervious to all forms of female beauty, including the potential brides that his mother offers) to add weight to the play’s argument that the supernatural powers of attraction victimize even those whose philosophy depends on the ability to govern emotions. It reflects the playwrights’ hostility toward neo-Stoicism and their anti-Puritan sentiment.
resilient bond between Beatrice Johanna and De Flores. He alludes to the proverbial statement that “one man’s meat is another man’s poison,” and wanders away without expending any effort to offer a solution. De Flores, cognizant that he appeals to Beatrice Johanna by virtue of his anomalous qualities – he is, for example, the only man in her entire memory that she has hated – remains even less proactive than Alsemero, the cuckold. De Flores simply hovers near Beatrice Johanna “some twenty times a day” to “force errands, frame ways and excuses // to come into her sight” even though she openly professes that she hates him (II.i.29 – 31). Nature, De Flores knows, will take its course.

This course, odd feeding, has especially damning results, and is subsequently distinct from the course of nature described in Donne’s pleasantly inconstant libertine cosmos, where bonds form and break in a vibrant sexual landscape that “is the nursery of // music, joy, life and eternity.” The Changeling’s course of nature differs also from the likenesses and similarities that are seen as the source of constancy in Shakespeare’s friendships, such as that between Helena and Hermia in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1595). Friendship flourishes best when two partners share “schooldays’ friendship, childhood innocence” and mature together: as Helena says to Hermia, “so we grew together, // like to a double cherry, seeming parted. // But yet an union in partition… with two seeming bodies, but one heart” (III.ii.208 – 210, 212). Middleton and Rowley, however, present “twins of mischief” whose proclivity for one another defies the laws of
nature’s homonormativity and those of Donne’s cosmos, which are more congenial to frequent separations (V.III.142). To fully comprehend the dynamics of human nature in all three of these scenarios, many Jacobean texts suggest, would prevent contract dissolution and keep heteromarital alliances intact – to say nothing of preventing a host of other dire conflicts in these plays, including conspiracy, blackmail, betrayal, and murder.

From these problems and others have emerged two critical traditions worth mention from among scholarship on the nature of desire and subjectivity in *The Changeling*: humanist readings and psychoanalytic readings. Both seek to develop a casual relationship between the lacunae of constancy (as either sexual fidelity or the ability to endure or to govern passion) and the absence of some essential mark of selfhood, such as morality or sanity. For example, many readings based on human character suggest that *The Changeling* proves that a person without a strong moral code simply cannot sustain constancy. Immorality, then, leads to criminal acts, for these readings assume also that fully operative human nature will be moral rather than, say, that which produces sociopaths. This tendency to focus on the play’s crime makes sense given that the generic conventions of revenge tragedies (unrepentant, vindictive leading roles and equally dark endings and beginnings) require a social epidemiology of death and violence: “For many years,” as Stevie Simkin notes, “revenge tragedies were largely neglected, consigned to a dark corner of the map of Renaissance culture...revenge
tragedies were embarrassing blemishes best ignored.” Although he did not ignore the play, T.S. Eliot (1951) found it to be a shameful display of undeveloped nature:

The tragedy of The Changeling is an eternal tragedy, as permanent as Oedipus or Antony and Cleopatra; it is the tragedy of the not naturally bad but irresponsible and undeveloped nature, caught in the consequences of its own action...Beatrice is not a moral creature; she becomes moral only by becoming damned.

To Eliot, Middleton and Rowley suggest that people with “undeveloped nature” acquire morality (feelings of shame, guilt and penitence) only after committing serious crimes. Critics who agree with Eliot focus on the progression of Beatrice Johanna’s moral degradation as she gives in to her willful urges for lust until her brief, dubious apology in the play’s final scene of redemption. To Mohammad Kowsar (1986), Beatrice Johanna and De Flores form a vindictive crime machine that spreads evil like a contagion. John Levay (1987) argues that sin and corruption transform Vermandero’s

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castle into the “principality of Satan.” And Sharon Stockton (1990) describes Beatrice Johanna as a second Lilith who leaves Eden to copulate with Satan. These readings describe how spiritual corruption, loss of sexual purity, and individual pathologies commandeer patrilineal succession in Alicante and disrupt the play’s domestic setting.

Secondly, this play is very alluring to those who practice literary psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic critics are drawn to this play for good reasons. Key evidence includes Middleton and Rowley’s decision to alter their source text, John Reynolds’s pamphlet, *The Triumphs of God’s Revenge against the Crying and Execrable Sin of Wilful and Premeditated Murder*, Book I, History IV (1620), for the stage in two provocative ways. First, they invented the subplot’s madhouse scenes, which suggest interest in a more clinical approach to human behavior. Secondly, the playwrights transformed De Flores from a “gallant young gentleman” into an older, physically repellant servant who delivers messages for an absent father. Struggling to move beyond these two approaches (moral and psychoanalytic), literary scholars have long sought to develop an early modern analog to the subjects, methods, and interests loosely bound together under the heading of “psychology,” including psychoanalysis and, more generally, affect, or the passions: fear, anger, joy, etc. The work of embodiment theorists approached the subject from a materialist and rigorously historicist vein. One of their

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23 Levay, p. 13.

24 Daalder, p. xiii.
strongest contributions has been to consider traditional concerns of subjectivity as embodied events, and then to posit a recovery of what a “body” signified in a prior historical period. In part, they sought to undo the psychoanalytic underpinnings of a previous generation. For example, Joost Daalder, the editor of the 1990 New Mermaids edition of The Changeling, fills his textual footnotes with copious references to the libido, the unconscious, the “unconscious libido” and deep unconscious sexual drives. Again, these accounts are urged by lines from the play text that seem to beg for Freud, such as the “sheets are shrouds” and the beds are “charnel houses” (V.iii.83). Daalder addresses his word choice in the introduction: “I am uneasily aware of the fact that at times I slip into using the language of psychoanalysis. This, however, is for want of a better vocabulary, and not because I believe the play to match a modern intellectual system.”

Uneasily or not, some critics continue to work within a psychoanalytic paradigm. N.K. Sugimara (2006) follows Daalder in granting Beatrice Johanna an unconscious that represses erotic desire. Marjorie Garber (1994) convincingly argues that the Chaldean Book of Secrets is less a virginity test than a rubric for men or women to know if a woman achieves orgasm. The signs (laughter, sneeze, melancholy) “are not, in fact, the telltale signs of virginity, but rather of orgasm. Not the commodification and ownership of

25 Daalder, p. xxv.
women, as virgins, as mothers, but rather the intangibility of desire.”26 Finally, Deborah G. Burks (1995) and Judith Haber (2003) fault Middleton and Rowley for combining rape and marriage. They find the play’s defining moment in what they refer to as its “rape” scene, as De Flores blackmails Beatrice-Joanna:

Thy peace is wrought for ever in this yielding.
‘Las how the turtle pants! Thou’lt love anon
What thou so fear’st and fainst’st to venture on.”27

Haber finds homologies between Middleton and Rowley’s language (a turtle dove that “pants”) in the rape scene and the epithalamium, including Jonson’s masque, Hymenaei (1606), written for Francis Howard’s marriage to the Earl of Essex. Jonson’s wedding poem, as Haber writes, “focuses to an unusual degree on marital defloration.”28 In Haber’s historically attuned reading, she argues that, according to early modern culture, some signs (to fear or to loathe the men, or faint in their presence) that are manifest by virgins paradoxically intimate deep, scarcely bridled desire: “Beatrice’s loathing is

also itself viewed as the guarantor of her desire … contemporaneous with and indistinguishable from that desire.” Yet this “erotic logic” explanation of the attachment between Beatrice Johanna and De Flores neglects to account for the play’s decision to overlay sexuality with a constancy lexicon and then mercilessly demonstrate that system’s weakness.

One way to reconcile Haber and Daalder’s positions and to have a historicized psychology that speaks to desire, self-government, and conflicting perspectives of human nature in the 1620’s is to address the bizarre presence of Lipsian constantia in the madhouse subplot. In this second cuckoldry scheme, an older husband employs a spy (Lollio) to guard his young wife (Isabella) from wealthy gallants who join Bedlam’s authentic lunatics to try to seduce her. In a classic appropriation of the female inconstancy paradigm, an anxious husband keeps his wife captive – locked in a madhouse – in order to preserve his contract with her, presupposing that she will not remain constant of her own volition. Because women and madmen suffer from alteratio and are unfit subjects of contracts, they both live together under quarantine. Thus when Lollio observes that one patient (Antonio) cures himself by speaking confidently and kissing Isabella, the keeper automatically assumes that his patient’s progress results

29 Haber, p. 82.

from the fact that he has “read Lipsius,” the Dutch theologian who wrote *de Constantia* (III.iii.179).\(^{31}\) To Lollio, Antonio regains sanity and reaffirms his masculinity by reading neo-Stoic dialogues of Lipsius, while he simultaneously reaffirms Isabella’s female inconstancy when he seduces a married woman (although he never gets very far). The corrective power of constancy appears quite clear at this moment since it restores the prejudices of the civilized Spaniards to the fools and madmen of the Bedlam community.

Justus Lipsius, or “Joest Lips,” was best known in early modern England for his dialogue, *de Constantia* (1584). Between 1594 and 1670, *de Constantia*, described as a “popular and highly readable dialogue” that “yielded messages for those under governance” regarding outward comportment and submission, went through four English translations: 1594, 1653, 1654 and 1670.\(^{32}\) As Adriana McCrea observes, “with its message of fortitude, perseverance, and adaptability, and in its use of classical

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\(^{31}\) A reference to Ovid’s *Ars armandi* immediately follows that of Lipsius. Yet this sequence is logical. If Middleton and Rowley associate Lipsius with constancy, his opposite would be Ovid, who was known for his interest in mutability. Lollio alludes to *constantia* through Lipsius when he witnesses the kiss to introduce a pun on the word “lips.” The pun returns in the final act when Alsemoro asks Beatrice Johanna when De Flores, who was once “your rancorous loathing,” became “your // Lips’ saint” (V.iii.50, 53).

\(^{32}\) Lipsius’s *Politica* (six books of government) rivaled the works of Jean Bodin in popularity. There were fifteen editions of the Latin original between 1589 and 1599, in addition to translations into Dutch, English, French, Italian and German. Including translations, we have ninety-six editions. For more, see Gerhard Oestreich’s *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*. (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1982), pp. 57 – 89.
According to Lipsius, those who successfully practice *constantia* obtain an unmovable frame of mind and eliminate passion, including desire and joy (false goods) and fear and sorrow (false evils): four affections that he believes “greatly disquiet the life of man.” Constancy also heals “deep settled diseases of the mind” that are unmitigated by travel or traditional somatic vehicles of temperance. As Lipsius writes, “music, wine, and sleep have often quenched the first enkindled sparks of anger, sorrow, and love, but they have never weeded out any settled or deep-rooted grief. Likewise I say that traveling might perhaps cure superficial scars, but not substantial sores.” By leaving aside these distractions, “valiant and good men” who practice reason and patience will persevere aided by the “firm food of philosophy.”

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34 Lipsius, Justus. *On constancy.* Sir John Stradling, trans. (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix P, 2006), p. 42. Lipsius received a Catholic upbringing and a Jesuit education at Cologne and Louvain, but he was forced to flee Belgium in 1572 after Spanish troops seized his property. He took refuge at the Lutheran University in Jena. In 1579, he went Leiden’s Calvinist University, remaining there for thirteen years until his final conversion to Catholicism in 1592.

35 Ibid, p. 34.

36 Ibid, pp. 81 – 82. In part, Lipsius’s dialogue borrows from the Christianized georgic. Its syncretism (he reconciles pagan and Christian philosophy) was widely admired among the educated. Furthermore he places his interlocutors in a garden on the outskirts of a city (Antwerp) destroyed by war. Rather than turn this retreat into an Arcadia, Lipsius demands that his followers build an interiority defined by equilibrium.
As it pertains to The Changeling’s main plot, Lipsius’s rationalist advice is surprisingly ineffectual, as is any theory that denies somatic hunger in favor of a disembodied mind and the “firm food of philosophy.” Although owning an internal locus of control was desirable in many Renaissance contexts, it is doubtful how it was possible to alleviate all internecine discord given the ubiquity of war and, in the English context, the political dimensions of spiritual practice after the Henrician Reformation when the meaning of treason could change over night. Nonetheless, as Andrew Shifflet observes, “Lipsius is concerned with the proper way of living for persons surrounded by civil war, persons whose lives are structured and even fulfilled by war, persons who are even said to have war inside themselves.”

Clearly if Shifflet is to be believed, Lipsius had the best intentions. But as his text only pertains to men, Lipsius neglects to mention the intersecting domains of female inconstancy, consent, and the solvency of marital contracts, unless in their absence he implies that inconstant men become effeminate. Most of the discussion between his two male interlocutors involves the controversial religious apostasy (a common definition of the term “inconstancy”) that some felt was necessary to embrace to remain pacifist during a war. Given that a subplot is often considered an ironic commentary on the main plot, the punning misuse of Lipsius’s rather serious text foreshadows stoic Alsemero’s severe fall for an inconstant woman. A

constant man does not kiss a woman, nor does he sign a contract with her which would force him into the paradoxical state of staying constant to inconstancy: he reads classical philosophy and fights the infidels in Malta.

The Changeling continues to reinforce stoicism’s vulnerability to nature’s frequent frailty in the main plot. Jasperino, Alsemoro’s source of good counsel and friendship, reminds the love-struck Alsemoro of his historical dedication to bachelorhood in the first scene: “lover I’m sure y’are none, the stoic was // found in you long ago” (I.i.36-7). Whatever a Jacobean audience knew about “stoics,” they must know that they seek immunity to the passions, including romantic love, which signifies weakness and potentially lethal heterogeneity of sexes. The contrast between scholarship (Alsemoro was bound for Malta) and delay, characterized as “idleness” in Alicante, also establishes old, vaguely misogynist oppositions between industriousness and celibacy, travel and sexual segregation, and men and women. We also learn that Alsemoro’s father, a Valencian, died in war:

An unhappy day
Swallowed him at last at Gibraltar
In fight with those rebellious Hollanders,
Was it not so? (I.i.179-182)

In yet another allusion to stoicism, the war that killed Alsemoro’s father at Gibraltar in 1607 happens to be the subtext of de Constantia, or what Languis (one of the two interlocutors) refers to throughout as the conflicts of “Belgica:” the Dutch War of Independence (1568 – 1648) against the Spanish Empire. Alsemoro cannot revenge his
father because of a 1609 truce: the “late league // prevented me,” he laments (I.i.183-4). Alsemero is not a pacifist by his own volition.

Indeed, the Spanish citizens of The Changeling were Catholic enemies to the Protestant cause and historically seen by most Englishmen as particularly militant aggressors, one of whom (to add insult to injury) has sought to marry the heir apparent to the English throne, Prince Charles. For a Spaniard to be the standard-bearer of the “rebellious Hollanders’” dry policy of constantia is especially ironic, even more so when Alsemero’s prior obligation – a masculine passion that he stifles – is revenge through bloody military conquest. One implication of this observation is that among men, international peace treaties that call for a cease action (essentially, preventing men such as Alsemero from violent acts of revenge) ask men to submit and thus to oppose their violent natures. Alsemero’s quest for honor in Malta belies his private contractual goal (revenge) that creates tension with his public, contractual obligation as a Spanish citizen who follows his King, even if the King chose to sign an unpopular treaty. Paralyzed and made effeminate by a peace treaty that is instituted without his consent, it is little wonder that Alsemero finds himself distracted by the sickness of romantic love in Alicante and inconstant to his own crusade.

In addition to the broken fealty between Alsemero and his dead father, other kinds of contract dissolution reign in The Changeling, as nearly every relationship but that of Beatrice Johanna and De Flores moves toward betrayal. The father who was
“swallowed” at Gibraltar by the Dutch suggests death by sea and the widespread
testimony of epic-scale dissolution captured in Boboli’s sea grotto but it also prefigures
Alsemero’s near death from an obsession with Beatrice Johanna, the first woman he
desires and whose appetite he never understands. Through these associations, the
playwrights connect Alsemero’s erotic drowning in a time of forced amity (a bad
contract) with an impotence to revenge his father’s death and his decision to become a
scholar of stoicism. Alsemero has been asked to do what James Stuart (a diplomatic
“peace-maker,” according to his motto) asks of his subjects in 1621: ignore the
Protestant cause on the continent, stifle the urge for war, and welcome a future Spanish
queen whose inconstancy and perverse urges will no doubt undercut the Stuart blood
line. By cleverly assigning everyone in the play a Spanish role, Middleton and Rowley
hide the triple threat that Spain currently represented to their own country, drawing
from the memory of Armada Year (1588) a time when Spain did attack England by sea.
In its last appearance, the sea returns in the finale when Alsemero imagines Beatrice
Johanna and De Flores’s descent into “Mare Mortuum,” or the Dead Sea, where they
“shall sink to fathoms bottomless” (V.iii.119, 120). Even in the underworld, Alsemoro
reasons, this unlikely pair will remain constant to one another: as they sink into death,
they are a darker version of Dante’s sympathetic lovers, Francesca and Paolo, whose
adulterous romantic bond did not require crossing socioeconomic class.
Dissolution extends from *mare mortuum* to the register of guilty souls whose names are written in the permanent book of heaven. Alsemero insists that Vermandero’s name “be blotted out” from this record since he was innocent of knowledge of his daughter’s deceit and breach of hospitality (V.iii.182). Alsemero reserves guilt for Beatrice Johanna and De Flores. His rigorous exposure of their affair and his public condemnation of their betrayal in the play’s final scene call into doubt Alsemero’s first pedantic speech on nature’s “frequent frailty,” which essentially freed subjects from consent to their peculiar tastes or perverse impulses. By the finale, Alsemero changes his tone: Nature does not indemnify these lovers from the wrath of God or the fury of the survivors. Furthermore, the constancy between Beatrice Johanna and De Flores that, from nature’s perspective, expresses healthy fealty goes unrewarded, since their perverse urge for one another lead to actions (murder, betrayal, lust) that undercut nearly every time-honored social rule: a daughter’s obedience to her father, a wife’s obedience to her husbands, a servant’s obedience to his master, and patrilineal succession through marital contracts designed to pass on wealth. When called upon to strengthen these social precepts through heteromarital alliances, *The Changeling* suggests that Nature – left to its own devices – is a terrible matchmaker.

Upon initial examination, the rationalist and neo-Stoic answer to appetite that Middleton and Rowley offer in their subplot pun – internal constancy – appears to return Renaissance scholarship to a moment of pre-embodiment theory: Lipsius
presents a non-somatic tool of self-government that aims to eliminate the internal
discord that stems from war, desire, passion, and instability. These familiar rules of
Enlightenment thought nearly “match the modern intellectual system” that Daalder, the
psychoanalytic editor, tries to avoid. However, I have shown how nature’s “frequent
frailty,” the text’s true culprit, takes revenge on constantia as it drives unlike partners
into a dissonant, violent league and thwarts all attempts by those who represent
patriarchy to arrange for the succession of land, wealth, and the genetic material
signified by blood. The story of a vindictive comeback by a hungry Galenic body whose
needs are not met by Lipsius’s proselytizing, however, is not an entirely complete
interpretation. Although I support the reading of the hungry Galenic body, but I would
add that the text’s close scrutiny of nature’s “frequent frailty” generates another
important claim in Renaissance natural philosophy: the contingency of any behavior
that is deemed natural.

*The Changeling* emphatically asks that we reconsider the naturalness of attraction,
and by doing so, it asks that we reconsider the social rules justified by commonly held
beliefs concerning natural laws, including women’s inferiority of mind (described in the
marriage homily as inconstancy) and their responsibilities, including the need to live
chaste, silent, and obedient lives. *The Changeling* overturns a series of early modern
determinism arguments. But it also introduces a new one. The moment when Alsemero
designates taste for certain food or appetite for certain people as incorrect evaluations
that are beyond understanding or repair, his attitude is one of resignation to an absolute principle as inexplicable as astrology or Calvinist election: men and women are confined by an *a priori* taste that they can not unlearn. With this assertion, he closes down conversation when it could begin. He diverts attention from other kinds of confinement that are unique to women in seventeenth-century England. It is unclear if Beatrice Johanna consented to marry Alonzo, if she had control over her father’s manservant, and – what is unspeakable – if she has a purpose in life other than marriage and obedience. Vermandero’s castle before the torrent of odd feeding and contract dissolution may have contained one of the most unnatural, highly artificial arrangements possible. In the play’s most radical assertion, normal feeding may be odd feeding.

Because the mechanics of desire and human nature are used to criticize the artifice of some marital contracts, *The Changeling* resembles the mode of pastoral, which often opposes court culture in favor of primitive, gut-level impulses – be they revenge, wonder, eroticism, or freedom. To recall, Renaissance pastoral evaluates the court and its customs by transforming courtiers into gentlemen-shepherds who retire to the countryside to write poetry, often creating lyric with double meanings and topical allusions that refer back to the court. *The Changeling* obviously lacks this shepherding landscape but it criticizes a pastoral value, constancy, by making it appear arbitrary, doubtful, and oppressive. When constancy between two people does appear, it creates
disastrous consequences and lovers soon die. But nature is certainly not conceived heroically. If women are inconstant by nature, for example, then nature (including corporeality) is not a sacred, corrective and purifying agent: it incites wives to rebel against husbands and to thoughtlessly or heroically (depending on one’s perspective) break their contracts. In the “biology is destiny” argument, marital contracts result in an unnatural form of captivity for women (because they are inconstant by nature) and for men (who are strung along as constant husbands to inconstant wives).

Nonetheless, I contend that Middleton and Rowley do interrogate the conditions of marital contracts and consent. They do so in their dismissal of an Enlightenment philosophy that simply teaches the law of internal constancy without addressing the uneven power dynamics at play among early Stuart marriages. But because they substitute an *a priori* vision of desire, they evade some of the more serious issues at hand and abandon the opportunity to address social justice. Their play’s tragic conclusion is hostile to communal harmony, heteromarital comic resolutions, and natural impulses. A libertine poet such as Donne chose not to link inconstancy with tragedy, since in his third elegy inconstancy reflects a natural world that encourages perpetual change, including separation. To Donne, constancy is a perversion of normal urges. Middleton and Rowley do not say this, but their effort to show that Alicante’s perverse urges lead to constant relationships has the same effect by default: questioning a social fabric
whose roots are based on a number of tenaciously held gendered assumptions regarding human nature and in/constancy.
5. Skepticism in the Greenworld: Competing Constancies in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania* (1621)

5.1 Constant Queens, 1621

In romance, the trope of female inconstancy functions slightly differently than in early Stuart dramas of contract. As Katherine Rowe observes, “Renaissance scholars have tended to see romance as the genre of liberal political theory, supplying the earliest vision of a subject constituted in positive, transformative sentiment and radical self-reflection.”¹ Lady Mary Wroth’s (ca. 1586 – ca. 1640) response to alleged female inconstancy in 1621 is two-fold. First, as I will demonstrate, she flatly denies the accusation by featuring heroines who self-identify as constant and who take much pleasure in lamenting constancy’s absence among men. Essentially, Wroth reverses the traditional in/constancy paradigm in her defense of women and in her censure of men. She also grafts literary tropes from the pastoral (erotic plots, gentlemen-shepherds,

¹ Rowe, p. 92. See also Northrop Frye’s observation that “with the rise of the romantic ethos, heroism comes increasingly to be thought of in terms of suffering, endurance, and patience … this is also the ethos of the Christian myth, where the heroism of Christ takes the form of enduring the Passion.” *Secular Scripture* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1976), p. 88.
poiesis, and the celebration of warm weather and self-deliberation in a rustic world) popularized by her maternal uncle, Sir Philip Sidney, forty years prior in *The Old Arcadia* (1579) to her romance, the *Urania* (1621). She importantly reverts to what had become an outmoded form by 1621 both to shield her female protagonists against charges of inconstancy and to insist on the possibility of a love that is immune to Time.

Furthermore, by reanimating Sidney’s Arcadian *topos*, which was originally designed to honor the constant and chaste Queen Elizabeth, she remains extraordinarily constant to her natal kinship network and she makes explicit pastoral’s core alliance with constancy. But as many readers have noticed, Wroth valorizes a definition of constancy that she modifies nearly beyond recognition.\(^2\) Her second response to the charge of female inconstancy is to illuminate its central conceptual paradoxes for men and for women, including the ethically compromised neo-Stoic principle of *dissimulatio* ridiculed by anti-theatricalists. Her approval of jurisprudence (strategic thought) as a response to

contingency in human affairs demystifies pastoral’s romantic assumptions and, as Melissa E. Sanchez writes, supports a “more compromised vision of mixed monarchy” with topical allusions.³

Finally, Wroth’s interest in contract solvency is hardly surprising given the political circumstances of 1621. In 1611 James I dissolved Parliament, and it was not until 1621 that he ended his personal government of England by calling Parliament to session (according to the OED, either a set period of time for a meeting or in English parliamentarian use, “applied to the period between the opening of Parliament and its prorogation”) once again. The King’s eleven years (1610 – 1621) of personal rule led some to doubt “whether parliament would ever meet again and a genuine possibility that England would follow the continental trend toward absolutism.”⁴ James had called a “parleamente of love” to session in 1614, but since he also dissolved it two months later historians now refer to this meeting as the “Addled Parliament.” The 1614 session serves to illustrate the arbitrary timetable and the failure of consensus during interactions between the crown and parliament. Parliament opposed the King’s philosophy of government and his foreign policy, especially James’s refusal to send aid to his own daughter, Princess Elizabeth, and the Elector Palatine during the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648). James received no revenue from taxation during his years of personal

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³ Sanchez, p. 450.

⁴ Sanchez, p. 454.
government and was forced to invent titles and sell crown land to support his expenditure and that of his family. According to the historian Christopher Hill, the “years 1604 to 1629 have been described as those in which the House of Commons ‘won the initiative.’” Whether or not a legitimate crisis of female in/constancy existed, or it served to veil a complaint over the arbitrary timetable of the sessions between the King and parliament in 1621 – at least for Middleton and Rowley, whose play was licensed for Lady Elizabeth’s Servants and performed quite near the Inns of Court at the Phoenix Theater – is a broader question that this study seeks to illuminate.

Perhaps no Renaissance writer is more frequently identified with the subject of constancy than Lady Mary Wroth – in both the conspicuous details of her biography and her primary works of literature. Wroth’s scandalous personal life (a publicly unhappy marriage, an impoverished widowhood, and two illegitimate children with her first cousin, Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke) tends to be inseparable from her critical reception in the 1620’s and even today among contemporary scholars. Noting this conflation, Margaret P. Hannay observes that Wroth is primarily known as a “romance writer whose fiction grew out of her own unhappy love affair.” She is also known as a writer who imitates the antiquated literary forms chosen by her uncle, Sir Philip Sidney,

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(the pastoral and the sonnet sequence) in order to capitalize off of his reputation.

Although she published her literary works, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* and the *Urania*, in 1621, five years after Shakespeare’s death, she grew up in the literary world of the Sidney-Pembroke circle and she wrote on self-sovereignty, regal affairs, and the appeal of outward conformity. Furthermore, at least one critic, Sheila Cavanagh, has persuasively argued that Wroth’s prose romance directly responds to Edmund Spenser’s *Mutabilitie Cantos* or, “The Legend of Constancie.” For each of these reasons, Mary Wroth’s work is relevant to England’s desire to promote the value of constancy in the tumultuous decades before the outbreak of the civil war.

Yet as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Wroth’s development of the theme of constancy is strikingly ambivalent. She virtually announces this ambivalence in her thirteenth sonnet, “Deare fammishe nott,” when she elevates the adage, *chamaeleonte mutabiliore*, or “as changeable as the chameleon.” As she promises that, “Camaelion-like” she “would live, and love,” she identifies with an animal with no

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7 According to Cavanagh, “unlike Spenser, who focuses on the impact of change upon the universe...Wroth more frequently explores the repercussions of pride and fidelity in most closely circumscribed domestic spheres.” See “Romancing the Epic: Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania* and Literary Traditions.” In *Approaches to the Anglo and American Female Epic, 1621-1982.* Bernard Schweizer, ed. (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2006), p. 27. Nonetheless, the expression “domestic spheres” waters down Wroth’s work and makes it an unlikely response to Spenser, whose titaness Mutabilitie ranges across the globe in pursuit of power, conquers and moon and challenges Jove.
natural skin tone whose chief talent is mimicry.8 With this extraordinary disclosure, she exalts changeability of character as a type of play-actor who is guiltlessly free to dissemble while at the same time proffer covert steadfastness to a beloved. By signaling allegiance to the chameleon, Wroth follows the pattern of Shakespeare’s play-actor sovereigns, Richard III and Hamlet, who hone the chameleon’s talent for self-sustenance and autonomy through improvisation.9 As Anthony Munday states in his 1580 anti-theatricality pamphlet: “Plaiers cannot better be compared than to the Camelion.”10 Wroth, who participated in Jacobean court theatricals, even when they required applying black paint to her body in Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* (1605), flaunted metamorphic power in court culture and in her sonnet sequence by evoking the chameleon.

Until now, non-punitive, creative, and reversible mutability as a frame of reference in Wroth’s sonnet sequence has gone unrecognized. For example, Jeffrey Masten argues that Wroth’s sonnets associate “emergent private space with


9 In *III Henry VI*, Richard tells the audience that “I can add colours to the chameleon, // change shapes with Proteus for advantages // and set the murderous Machiavel to school” (III.ii.191 – 193). In *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet (while in his antic disguise) tells Claudius that he is “excellent, i’faith, of the chameleon’s dish. I eat the air, promise-crammed” (III.ii.92). Wroth’s chameleon allusion would be well understood among her peers.

10 Qtd. in Barish, p. 101.
(de)privation and emptiness” as a result of her refusal to circulate in public. To Masten she evades the public eye by leaving so few connections to specific people or recognizable events in the sonnets. This may be so, but my reading of Wroth’s subjectivity in “Deare fammish noott” questions Masten’s position on retreat and emptiness. Instead, I find a positive affirmation of mimicry, theater, and transformation that undercuts or qualifies the sequence’s theme of constancy as fidelity to one’s beloved or even self-determination.

The chameleon effectively signifies Wroth’s enigma as an ambitious actor-courtier in 1621, but she was also associated with the hermaphrodite, another reason to distance her from constancy. In an infamous anecdote, Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham, became so angry by the Urania’s allusions to his personal life that he immediately challenged Wroth’s sexuality rather than the content of the book: Denny mocks her as a “hermophradite in show, in deed a monster” whose “wrathfull spite conceived an Idell book.” According to Denny, for a woman to speak out displayed a sexual transgression even Wroth’s close connection with the Sidney family could not prevent. The hermaphrodite, reminiscent of Wroth’s name for her beloved Amphilanthus (or “lover of two”), challenges normative understandings of sexual constancy and marriage: the hermaphrodite’s capabilities extend beyond those of one


12 Wroth, The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth, introduction, p. 32.
sex. The preternatural hermaphrodite “in show,” like the “lover of two,” was incapable of heteromarital fidelity. Moreover, the hermaphrodite accusation also surfaced when a male actor played a woman’s part. “To weare the Apparel of another sex,” wrote Philip Stubbes in 1583, “is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the veritie of his own kinde. Wherefore these Women may not improperly be called Hermaphroditi, that is, Monsters of bothe kindes, half women, half men.”13 By bringing back an insult from a previous generation, Denny remembers Wroth as an actress whose roman a clef deserves anti-theatrical polemic. The hermaphrodite and the chameleon bridge an underlying investment in performance (role-playing in the world of flux) with the dialogue that sustains Wroth’s jurisprudence that I discuss below in my reading of her prose romance.

_The Countess of Mongomerie’s Urania_ is a 661-page prose romance primarily devoted to the errant, chivalric quests of two sets of siblings (Parselius and his sister Pamphilia, and Amphilanthus and his sister Urania) in complementary romantic liaisons.14 Despite the formidable recurrence of these two pairs as they experience significant separations and reunions, Wroth’s romance archetype generally stands alone, a victim of betrayal. She or he is a constant lover who laments “changings” in the beloved while seeking it for him or herself, whether through a brief respite or the eternal cessation of death. Urania, the princess who begins her life as a shepherdess, actually

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13 Qtd. in Barish, p. 73.

14 Part II of the _Urania_ was not published in Wroth’s lifetime.
studies how to dissolve her bond with her errant lover, Parselius. As she addresses him in a dream, “so farre are you now from my thoughts,” she warns, “as I study how I nevermore may heare of you; and to assure you for this, you shall see me give my selfe before your face, to another more worthy, because more just.” And what she predicts in the dream comes true. In a sweeping departure from the determinist arguments of the Elizabethan marriage homily or The Changeling, which assume that women are born with a poverty of reason and an excess of passion, the Urania introduces women who reason and who profess judgment on men. Melissea, the text’s female prophet, interprets Urania’s inconstancy through the lens of social justice: “Bee not offended [that] this is your fate,” she tells Urania, “nor bee displeased, since though [your relationship] must change, it is but just change, bringing it from him alike disquieted.”

Rather than find cruelty in Melissea’s words, which evoke the reciprocity that guides Donne’s cosmos, Wroth suggests that her readers imagine how a dissolved contract might alleviate disquiet for both parties. A variety of passions and an endless procession of events have separated the central characters, whose adjustments to their partners are pragmatic. This even-handed approach to change allows Wroth to occasionally discard lofty, chivalric idealism in favor of the Quixotic realism soon to be


16 Wroth, Urania, p. 190.
embraced by the eighteenth-century novel. Unlike *mare mortuum*, which calls upon the destructive power of the sea to dissolve the body, the *Urania*’s sea baptizes the text’s heroes and sends them off toward fresh adventures. In order that Urania may “live contentedly,” for example, she must dive off the Rocke of St. Maura, “for this must make her live, and forget her unfortunate love, which vertue that water hath.” In a single episode, a female seer (Melissea) recognizes that an affliction-free life has value and that the dissolution of one contract can be an act of charity. To this prophet, the value of change and value of forgetfulness exceed that of constancy, which alienates its practitioners from a world of mutability.

As if to prove this point, neither of Wroth’s two heroines is ultimately constant in affect, for Urania marries Steriamus (“with whom she lives as happily as anyone in the *Urania* is allowed”) and Pamphilia weds Rodomondro.17 Wroth’s heroines criticize constancy as that which limits responsiveness to external change. Male characters, such as Amphilanthus, will periodically make remarks such as “constancie I see, is the onely perfect vertue.”18 But to them it is an unattainable goal, infinitely removed. Although it structures their nomadic quests, the holy grail of constancy is made ironic by the knights’ repeated failures. Wroth’s heroines, on the other hand, successfully remove or qualify what they have – indeed, what they acknowledge as socially and morally

17 Sanchez, p. 467.

oppressive. If, as Naomi J. Miller writes, the “quest for female identity rather than romantic love underlies the fictive patterns of Wroth’s narrative,” it is a female identity whose first challenge is to unlearn constancy conceived as a static bond with a changing beloved. In her censure of men, Wroth reverses the paradigm established by the marriage homily or *The Changeling* and exposes how it is women who must be constant to inconstancy.

Designating constancy as that which ironically promotes the impulse to change in the *Urania* illuminates the enchanted “Throne of Love” on the island of Cyprus, in an episode that Josephine A. Roberts refers to as the “ideological center of the romance.” In this enchanted trial, statues of Venus, Cupid, and Constancy signify “Love’s Progress.” Only devoted lovers who pass its test will progress toward sublimation, while those who fail become locked in a tower. Because Parselius is inconstant, his lover, Urania, is kept captive by the enchantment. With Urania as an example, Wroth argues that constant women risk exposing themselves to imprisonment of a far more sinister kind: “thus were the women for their punishment, left prisoners in the throne of

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19 Miller, Naomi J. “‘Not much to be marked’: Narrative of the Woman’s Part in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*.” *SEL* (29) 1998, p. 127.

Love,” Wroth observes, “which Throne and punishments are daily built in all humane hearts.”

In this aside we learn that the extremes of constancy generate self-martyrdom and self-confinement. The Throne of Love casts doubt on what revisionist critics have taken as the text’s central socio-political platform. If constancy is the prize among all these affairs, it is not worth anything. Critics who seek to recuperate Wroth in a tradition of English poetry as the archetype of a committed redress of an inconstant beloved would do better to identify Wroth’s work as proof that poetry is agonistic, and that despite our best abilities as critics to mark its trajectory by its statement of purpose it often undoes itself and carries unintended meaning. Or as Hanson phrases it, rather than see a “single definitive gesture” we analyze an “ongoing practice” – in this case, Wroth develops a series of positions that reconfigure constancy and the contrary energies it contains.

Toward the conclusion of Part I of the Urania, Pamphilia and Urania discuss judgment and constancy. In this episode, a disconsolate Pamphilia laments her “life wholly in affliction,” for she carries the virtue that undoes her: “this rare excellent qualitie of constancy.” Much of her private lament is par for the Urania’s course: she

21 Wroth, Urania, p. 50.
22 Hanson, p. 175.
23 Wroth, Urania, p. 464.
possesses an “unchanged heart and unstained affection,” while Amphilanthus is guilty of “inconstancy.” However, when Urania comes to her as a “Counsellor joined in commission with her friendship” the scene changes.\(^{24}\) Urania lectures her friend and ultimately convinces Pamphilia to comport herself and return to her kingdom’s subjects. Urania calls her friend’s judgment, “discreet govern’d spirit” and “resolution…full of brave knowledge” to task in Pamphilia’s inordinate, stultifying grief.

This grief stems, of course, from Amphilanthus’s inconstant affect. But in order for Pamphilia to model national government she must “governe one poore passion.”\(^{25}\) If she is to “command others” she must master herself; if she plans to “make laws” she needs to “soveraignise over a poore thought.” Urania advises against maintaining affect when the beloved is false (to avoid more pain), cruel (“were it not better he matched else-where?”) and “unconstant (which is a thing familiar with men).” Furthermore, Urania’s initial counsel centers on the preservation of health, Pamphilia’s independent worth, and her increase in the wisdom of this experience: “you see his imperfections,” she explains, “before you were tyed to them.”\(^{26}\)

Despite Urania’s reasonable counsel, Pamphilia obdurately refuses:

\(^{24}\) Wroth, \textit{Urania}, p. 467.

\(^{25}\) James Stuart makes a similar observation in his 1599 \textit{Basilikon Doron}: “as hee can not bee thought worthie to rule & command others, that cannot rule and dantone his owne proper affections & unreasonable appetites; so can he not be thought worthy to gouerne a Christian people.” See \textit{Basilikon Doron}. (Menston, England: The Scolar Press Limited, 1969), p. 2.

\(^{26}\) Wroth, \textit{Urania}, p. 469.
Pamphilia must be of a new composition before she can let such thoughts fall into her constant breast, which is a Sanctuary of zealous affection, and so well hath love instructed me, as I can never leave my master nor his precepts, but still maintaine a virtuous constancy.  

The terminology in Pamphilia’s response alerts us to the power imbalance inherent in this discussion, since she calls constancy her “Master.” Her constant breast acts as a “Sanctuary of zealous affection” that is inseparable from her “composition.” But because she learned her master’s precepts, this kind of constancy is also an acquired virtue. Furthermore, as she disallows “thoughts” (counsel) to enter her breast, she seems to suggest intellectual persuasion forgoes desire for Amphilanthus. Urania’s response narrows in on this opportunity:

‘Tis pittie,’ said Urania, ‘that ever fruitlesse thing Constancy was taught you as a vertue, since for vertue’s sake you will love it, as having true possession of your soule, but understand, this vertue hath limits to hold it in.  

Firstly, Pamphilia’s constancy (as abject fidelity) is taught. It is neither part of her a priori nature nor necessary for existence. Urania (after she escapes from the Tower) is a walking advertisement of the benefits of rejecting abject fidelity. Again, recurrent emphasis on learning (if it was learned, it could be unlearned) unhinges constancy from its powerful, transcendent remove from historical contingency. Importantly, Middleton and Rowley do not allow Beatrice Johanna this same luxury. Secondly, Urania explains

27 Wroth, Urania, p. 470.

28 Wroth, Urania, p. 470.
that constancy’s value differs markedly depending on the context. For those who break (i.e. those who initially betray) constancy enact a vice. But those “with whom it is broken, are by the breach free to leave or choose againe where more staidness may be found.” In the right context, a virtue can reasonably be called a weakness. But this is far from equivocation. Wroth’s ability to review a set of positions exemplifies what Joan Gibson writes of broadening the scope of intellectual history: a “wider context helps illuminate the relations of women and a philosophy culture and opens the door to some degree of cross-disciplinary work.”

Women who present themselves as reasoning about chastity in the *Urania* engage in philosophic dialogue. They interrupt the bells and whistles of romance to assert claims for rationality and for their own sexuality with forthrightness.

Interesting convergences appear elsewhere. Urania’s being “free to leave or choose againe” recalls Donne’s *Elegy III*, which pairs liberty with changeful subjectivity rather than fidelity to an [in]constant Other: “rather let me // allow her change, and then change as oft as she.” Urania even suggests that desire that exceeds calendrical temporality carries risk of heresy. A belief that fails to adjust to worldly circumstances may have mortal consequences. “Tis a dangerous thing,” Urania advises, “to hold that

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29 Gibson, p. 1.
opinion, which in time will prove flat heresie.” The unsupported belief that Pamphilia’s constancy demands may become mere opinion and “flat” heresy which is an opinion for which you could die. Or her fidelity may continue to enslave her, as she falsely believes it has “true possession” of her soul. Either way, Urania refuses to allow Pamphilia (and her constancy) to escape the passage of time and what it may prove. A prudent solution exercises caution. As Thomas Wyatt writes in his fourth sonnet, “and on my faith me thinck it goode reason // to chaunge propose like after the season,” Urania’s own counsel wrests her friend’s beliefs from an absolutist position. Her emphasis on “just decisions” removes blame and accusation. Because she was treated with diverseness, she is free to respond with diverseness.

Pamphilia’s compromise, to “let the Court bee happy with seeing her though in sadness,” results from Urania’s “excellent wit.” As long as Pamphilia’s grief is “so moderated with judgment” she will perform her “noble disposition” well enough for the court and her parents. Wroth recommends two points about practicing constancy: 1) she interrogates constancy as abject fidelity using a series of arguments inspired by social justice and 2) she encourages government of passion, even if it amounts to politically meaningful dissembling, or jurisprudence. This last point is vexing, however.


Pamphilia promises to moderate her grief with judgment in accordance with a prior noble disposition or constitution. This moderation unites her with her family, court and subjects, even as it distances her from completing the experience of grief. In this injunction to outwardly conform at the crucial moment, constancy splits Pamphilia. Wroth’s tendency toward comedy throughout this passage and her neat wrap-up (identification of Urania’s “excellent wit”) distracts readers from the passage’s otherwise unsettling conclusion. To choose either a constant course of action or deny that desire for a separate obligation is a decision (an evaluation) with conflicting perspectives. Urania triumphs in one way only. She convinces Pamphilia to detach by putting on a public mask.

If Wroth really martyrs her female characters for constancy (whether as self-constant or Other-constant, two sides of the same coin of abject fidelity) she does so half-heartedly; no degree of historicization can erase the presence of this inner tension. An apt way to express this half-heartedness or qualifying irony, evidenced in her many counter-examples of just changes, is ironic constancy predicated by adjusted, displayed or hidden (i.e., “wisely govern’d”) passions. Vicissitude matters to this constancy, since constancy refers to the stable disposition of the soul and its passions relative to its capabilities of endurance, at any given moment. It is the tension between these poles (Pamphilia and Urania’s epistemic positions) that animates Wroth’s poetics. Unlike temperance, which emphasizes intervention and participation, constancy (paradoxically)
emphasizes *detachment*—from seasonal vicissitude, from political and historical exigencies, and from authentic self-presentation in public life. Constancy even signals detachment from passions, as it encourages early moderns to govern them rather than to experience or to eliminate them.
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Biography

Shannon Elizabeth Kelley was born on March 11, 1978 in Louisville, KY. She attended Furman University from 1996 to 1998 and the University of Louisville from 1998 to 2000. She received her Bachelor’s Degree in English from the University of Louisville in May of 2000. At Duke University, she was the recipient of the John L. Lievsay Dissertation Fellowship and she was a member of the John Hope Franklin Dissertation Working Group. In addition, she has received awards from the Folger Shakespeare Institute and from the Vienna International Summer University. She currently holds a tenure-track position as an assistant professor of Early Modern literature at Fairfield University.