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THE QUEER AND TRANS ECOLOGIES OF SHAKESPEARE'S OCEAN

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Masters of Arts

in the Department of English

The University of Mississippi

by

ELIJAH TWO BEARS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis squarely approaches the overlooked theoretical nexus of early modern blue ecologies and LGBTQIA2S+ studies to argue that Shakespeare's ocean is a deeply queer space that inspires both queer and trans effects in his characters, plays, and audiences across time. I argue you can't fully process Shakespeare's aquatic environments, and the broader range of his more watery plays, without accounting for the queer destabilization and trans self-fashioning that is inextricably linked with encountering the ocean, whether it is through shipwreck, ship travel, or near-drownings. This project recreates a lost world using whatever small gems of textual and historical evidence that we are left with. At the same time that this thesis is making meaning from the early modern ocean, I want to be careful not just to use the ocean as a mirror for humanity. We may learn from the ocean, especially in the context of climate change, and how the ocean impacts Shakespeare's characters, but this project is also about reading the ocean for the ocean's sake. Connecting queer and trans studies to Shakespeare's ocean is important for the field of early modern blue studies, especially as a push back against historicist strains of reading which construct obstacles for linking contemporary experiences of the LGBTQIA2S+ community with Shakespeare. Expanding our understanding of the ocean towards the theoretical realms of queer and trans identity allows for a greater understanding of the disorienting effects blue spaces produce on us humans. Using non-normative gender and sexuality as an experiential

and bodily starting place, we might better recognize how aquatic environments require vastly different modes of meaning-making, argument, and experience than land-based spaces where we feel comfortable and at home. Aligning early modern blue studies with generative work in queer and trans studies also requires ecocritical fields to grapple directly with marginalized bodies, both in Shakespeare's plays and contemporary identities.

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INTRODUCTION

EXPLORING THE THEORETICAL NEXUS OF QUEER AND TRANS STUDIES WITH THE EARLY MODERN OCEAN

Full fathom five thy father lies.

Of his bones are coral made.

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

Nothing of him that doth fade

But doth suffer a sea change

Into something rich and strange.

*Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell. (The Tempest 1.2.474-480)*¹

Ariel's oceanic song, used to lure Ferdinand away from the shore after a treacherous shipwreck, is as beautifully enticing as it is haunting. The spirit nymph creates an underwater world where kings are turned into reef as fleshy body parts are replaced with oceanic material. Alonso undergoes a total "sea change" where his bones become coral and his eyes become pearl as he sinks under the surface of the waves. Ariel's song captures the power that saltwater holds both in *The Tempest* itself, perhaps Shakespeare's most oceanic play, and in the mind of Shakespeare's early modern audience. Oceanic fluid radically rewrites the human body by

¹ All line numbers from the Shakespeare plays discussed in this thesis will come from the Folger Shakespeare Library editions.

transforming the sunken king into an oceanic life form (1.2.478). This song has been the focus of generative scholarship, especially in the field of ecocriticism and posthumanism. Steve Mentz, an early modern scholar whose work on blue humanities helped inspire this thesis, pushes us to not look past how the ocean drowns the song; “the real taste of the ocean gets lost in the flux. It shouldn’t” (*At the Bottom* 1). Ariel’s song serves to transmogrify flesh into aquatic matter. Shannon Kelly’s work on coral helps us understand the radical nature of this material and Alonso’s new body as she writes, “If it [coral] began as a mere underwater plant (herb, shrub, grass, or tree), its mineralized form was curative, perpetual, and exceedingly valuable. Alonso’s second, coral body, then, was a significant improvement on his pre-tempest mortality” (115). Ariel’s song is generative in that not only is the king transformed in these enchanting lines, he transformed for the better. The human body increases in literal and metaphoric value as it is reconfigured with oceanic materials.

To understand the radical work Ariel accomplishes throughout *The Tempest*, we must consider the harassment and control that Prospero subjects the spirit to. Early in the play, Prospero castigates Ariel with the line, “Dost thou forget/ From what a torment I did free thee?” (1.2.299-300). While the former duke thinks himself a saint for saving the spirit from what Jason Hogue calls the “arboreal prison” of the witch Sycorax, Ariel is thrown straight into another system of bondage, this time an oceanic prison (2). The persecution that Prospero subjects Ariel too drips with saltwater. Continuing with the line above, Prospero reprimands, “Thou dost, and think’st much to tread the ooze/ of the salt deep” and soon after calls Ariel “malignant thing” (1.2.301-302, 308). Mentz writes of this scene, “In *The Tempest*, swimming can be painful” (44). Indeed, Prospero disciplines Ariel’s lack of servitude by forcing the spirit

into the oceanic punishment of swimming the ooze. The aquatic harassment continues later as Prospero commands, "Go make thyself like a nymph o' th' sea. Be subject/ To no sight but thine and mine, invisible/ To every eyeball else" (1.2.369-361). Prospero not only believes that he has complete control over Ariel's body, but also that he can force the spirit's fluidity by making him transform into various other creatures.

While we could read the various transformations that Ariel undertakes solely as a condition of his bondage to Prospero, I will instead ask us to think of each of these alternative forms that Ariel takes as a resistant, generative movement away from Prospero's control. Ariel not only transforms Alonso into the sunken coral king but also changes his own bodily form throughout *The Tempest* as he alternates between species and states of being. The first major transformation that Ariel goes through is, of course, to become a shipwreck-causing storm. In the spirit's recap of the event, he explains he would "divide/ and burn in many places" like lightning, causing some men to jump overboard, and would then act as the wind; "I have dispersed them 'bout the isle" (1.2.234-235, 261). As a magic marionette's puppeteer, Ariel throws these men around the island physically, in addition to shaking them around mentally. The spirit causes these men to feel destabilized, thoroughly frightened that their worlds are being turned upside down in catastrophe, like when Ferdinand exclaims during the shipwreck, "Hell is empty/ And all the devils are here" (1.2.252-253). Ariel rapidly switches forms throughout the play from his base as a nymph, to the storm, to a harpy, as well as imitating various human voices.

Ariel embodies resistance to control and a focus on radical self-fashioning that calls to

mind contemporary understandings of trans identity. The spirit transes himself,² the shipwrecked men, and the drowned king, showing the audience of *The Tempest* that not just genders, but human bodies and identities themselves, are “potentially porous and permeable spatial territories” (Stryker, Currah, Moore 12). Ariel’s transformations run parallel to the assertion that transing can act as “an escape vector, line of flight, or pathway toward liberation” (Stryker, Currah, Moore 13). In rapidly switching forms throughout the play, sometimes under the prodding of Prospero, sometimes not, Ariel asserts his own selfhood by attempting to escape his second imprisonment and by producing all the magic and drama of the play. Prospero operates under the misguided assumption that he is in control of these supernatural elements, but it is truly Ariel who accomplishes each action. While Prospero begins Act 5 with, “When first I raised the tempest,” the audience knows it was actually Ariel who conjured the storm and forced the ensuing shipwreck (5.1.7). Prospero’s harassment, his actual imprisonment, of Ariel stems from this false notion that he is the one controlling the oceanic sorcery. As a result, each time Ariel enacts his transformative magic, we witness the spirit reasserting his agency and claim to freedom.

Ariel’s transness is linked intimately with the ocean as his fluidity in bodily presentation maps with the constant reorienting of aquatic fluidity. The spirit needs to carve a world for himself where he can exist and flourish in the face of harassment and bondage from Prospero. To do so, Ariel transforms himself and the others around him to build his own transecologically

² Stryker, Currah, and Moore write in their landmark introduction to the Women’s Study Quarterly special issue on trans studies, “‘Transing,’ in short, is a practice that takes place within, as well as across or between, gendered spaces. It is a practice that assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being, and that allows for their reassembly” (13).

minded underwater-scape where a king can be both human and ocean, alive and dead, masculine and feminine. Ariel's song, therefore, participates not just in the construction of the coral Alonso but in an entire act of trans world-making. Philip Gilreath summarizes Ariel's world-building in a way that hits on the trans persistence that I mean to highlight; "Ariel depicts the sea as a space of alternative cohesion: a nonhuman utopia that blots out the chaotic outcomes of human, social intervention, while nourishing the bodies that grow out of the human body, transforming them into something as yet unseen, incapable of being seen firsthand" (11). In the song and the larger story of *The Tempest* itself, Ariel creates an oceanic world where bodies transmogrify towards generative ends, a place where treading "the ooze/ of the salt deep" is not a punishment but a way to live into his fluid self and for others to realize their aquatic natures (1.2.301-302). The spirit brings us squarely to the intersection of queer and trans identity with blue environments. I will continue the work of exploring this intersection by wading into more obviously aquatic plays like *The Tempest* and *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and less obvious ones like *Richard III* which collectively argue that Shakespeare's ocean is a space intrinsically linked queer and trans bodies and experiences.

Oceanic Intersections

Early modern ecocriticism has long been preoccupied with terrestrial bias. Scholars in the field have gravitated towards green spaces, those land-based environments that are easy for us humans to imagine ourselves in. As championed by Steve Mentz, the "blue cultural studies"³ movement challenges us to expand our attention to include oceanic and other aquatic

³ A term coined by Steve Mentz in his article "Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: The Sea, Maritime Culture, and Early Modern English Literature."

environments in our investigations of Renaissance literature. Mentz is among the first wave of scholars to produce a book-length ecocritical study focusing on Shakespeare's watery environments. His book, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, argues that the early modern period was embroiled in a shift of oceanic perception; "The sea's ancient status as alien God-space was rearticulated so that it also became a symbol of freedom" (Mentz, 69). Finding the ocean in Shakespeare is a project of working through what it means to be living in a time where this massive rearticulation was occurring. The ocean, across time, is a space of contradiction. It is unfathomable, yet we can look right at it and stand right in it. It is unknowable, alien, but still can speak to us personally. The deep ocean is a place of a certain freedom and certain death. It, as Mentz constantly reminds his readers, is where we come from but can never go back to (96). Mentz is not alone in writing about the blue environments in the early modern period, as scholars Lowell Duckert and Dan Brayton have since produced fantastic oceanic studies that add fluidity and complexity to the field.⁴ Both Duckert and Brayton skew towards posthumanist readings of the early modern ocean that witness its power to "dissolve notions of the human's autonomy and its singular narrativity" and interrogate "human claims of being at home in the world" (Duckert 30, Brayton 198). Saltwater wrecks what it means to be a stable, impermeable human. Central to the ethos of early modern blue studies is how these environments speak to us in the age of irreversible climate change. For Mentz, oceanic instability provides "a model for how to live in our world today, when landed life increasingly resembles conditions at sea" ("After Sustainability" 590). The ocean undermines the dangerous anthropocentric notion that humans

⁴ Dan Brayton - *Shakespeare's Ocean: An Ecocritical Exploration* (2012) and Lowell Duckert - *For All Waters: Finding Ourselves in Early Modern Wetscapes* (2017).

are the preeminent stewards of Earth. The work of these three blue scholars allows us to see how Shakespeare's ocean is mired in a "plasticity of meaning;" it is unimaginably deep, both in the effects it produced on the early modern subject and in what it could offer us today (Brayton 13).

The decentering quality of the Renaissance ocean lends itself particularly well to queer and trans readings of these environments. While Mentz, Brayton, and Duckert all point towards this kind of intersectional ecocriticism, they never make the connection explicitly despite how close they come.⁵ Chaos and instability are not just a way to recognize human limitations but also a vector for positive reformation of the individual and society. In his exploration of *Twelfth Night*, Mentz analyzes "[t]he ocean's capacity for rupture, disorder, and rebirth undergirds" the play (*At the Bottom* 51). Duckert, of all the blue early modern scholars, perhaps most explicitly makes moves to posit his ecocriticism in the realm of queer theory. The introduction of his book, *For All Waters: Finding Ourselves in Early Modern Wetscapes*, employs queer methodology, recognizing waterscapes as "love canals that emphasize these pleasures of encounter ... [whose] desires deviate from moral qualifications of purity that would problematically fashion the heteronormative body" (35). Like other blue ecology scholars, this argument about waterscapes ultimately has a presentist impetus of recuperating how "[t]he question of who is and who is not allowed to speak is also the question of who is and who is not excluded from a given ecology" (Duckert 40). However, while Duckert positions his work to speak broadly towards queer theory, trans studies are left unexplored in this monograph. Brayton, Duckert, and Mentz

⁵ Mentz, in his poetic descriptions of early modern blue spaces, writes, "The ocean changes people," and "With crisis comes transformative possibilities. Shipwreck writes change and generates tools for enduring change. Something always washes up on the beach" (*At the Bottom* 50, *Shipwreck Modernity* 177).

don't explicitly explore the queerness of the ocean or link the *transformative* nature of aquatic environments and the *transgender* experience, but their work certainly opens the door for this kind of reading.

Turning Our Attention to Queer and Trans Oceans

This thesis squarely approaches the overlooked theoretical nexus of early modern blue ecologies and LGBTQIA2S+ studies to argue that Shakespeare's ocean is a deeply queer space that inspires both queer and trans effects in his characters, plays, and audiences across time. I argue you can't fully process Shakespeare's aquatic environments, and the broader range of his more watery plays, without accounting for the queer destabilization and trans self-fashioning that is inextricably linked with encountering the ocean, whether it is through shipwreck, ship travel, or near-drownings. Engaging with the ocean in this period is both challenging and exciting as you attempt to read an environment that early moderns couldn't engage with, except from the surface. Shakespeare's characters and audiences of the time certainly sailed and swam, but everything under the waves was obscured save for what animals or debris might land on the shore or get caught in nets. The project, then, recreates a lost world using whatever small gems of textual and historical evidence that we are left with. At the same time that this thesis is making meaning from the early modern ocean, I want to be careful not just to use the ocean as a mirror for humanity. We may learn from the ocean, especially in the context of climate change, and how the ocean impacts Shakespeare's characters, but this project is also about reading the ocean for the ocean's sake. What does the ocean tell us about itself? If we pull lessons from the waters, how might they be about treating both environments and bodies with greater empathy and not reinforcements of our presumed terrestrial supremacy?

To witness the intimate, unfathomable queerness in Shakespeare's intimate, unfathomable ocean is a project of queer and trans ecologies. The general mission of queer ecologies, as the name suggests, is to create productive entanglements between the two studies so that queer theory may expand its scope to the non-human world in the former and so that ecocriticism may understand how "sexual relations organize and influence" the world (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 5). As such, "'queering ecology' involves the opening up of environmental understanding to explicitly non-heterosexual forms of relationship, experience, and imagination as a way of transforming entrenched sexual and natural practices toward simultaneously queer and environmental ends" (30). Queer and trans ecologies help us both address the limitations and opportunities of each theoretical field towards generative ends of making our way more compassionately in this world of climate change and violence against non-heteronormative and non-cisgendered identities.

Bringing queerness to Shakespeare's ocean will be a productively wet step forward for the field. I believe that connecting queer and trans studies to Shakespeare's ocean is important for the field of early modern blue studies, especially as a push back against historicist strains of reading which construct obstacles for linking contemporary experiences of the LGBTQIA2S+ community with Shakespeare. Expanding our understanding of the ocean towards the theoretical realms of queer and trans identity allows for a greater understanding of the disorienting effects blue spaces produce on us humans. Using non-normative gender and sexuality as an experiential and bodily starting place, we might better recognize how aquatic environments require vastly different modes of meaning-making, argument, and experience than land-based spaces where we feel comfortable and at home. Expanding early modern blue studies with generative work in

queer and trans studies also requires ecocritical fields to grapple directly with marginalized bodies, both in Shakespeare's plays and contemporary identities.

My project also is useful for early modern queer and trans ecologies, which have yet to wade into the ocean. A slew of early modern scholars have turned to queer and trans ecologies in recent years after the publishing of landmark forays into the contemporary side of the field; the edited collection *Queer Ecologies* and Nicole Seymour's *Strange Natures*.⁶ However, as was once the case with early modern ecocriticism, early modern queer ecologies are mostly land-locked. While this work has been incredibly generative and I am indebted to many of these articles and chapters, I believe we must move our queer and trans ecological readings into the ocean. The process of de-terrestrializing our scholarship, as I touch on throughout this thesis, is one method of disrupting anthropocentric ideals of humans as the most capable and important stewards of our planet. As climate change takes its most violently direct toll on the ocean, we must turn our attention to these waters.

When an early modern scholar participates in a conversation that has presentist concerns, a door opens for an argument on anachronism and whether it is proper to recuperate historical texts to speak towards our current time.⁷ I take cues from the chapter "Is it Shakespearean Ecocriticism if it isn't Presentist?" in which Sharon O'Dair answers her own question with an

⁶ Some important early modern queer and trans ecologies publications include Vin Nardizzi's "Shakespeare's Queer Pastoral Ecology: Alienation around Arden" and "Shakespeare's *Transplant* Poetics: Vegetable Blazons and the Seasons of Pyramus's Face," Karen Raber's "My Palfrey, Myself: Toward a Queer Phenomenology of the Horse-Human Bond in *Henry V* and Beyond," Christine Varnado's "Queer Nature, or The Weather in *Macbeth*," and Laurie Shannon's "Lear's Queer Cosmos," among others.

⁷ Ari Friedlander's introduction to the JEMCS special issue "Desiring History and Historicizing Desire" neatly summarizes how these types of debates have played out in circles of early modern queer studies.

emphatic no. I would not study Shakespeare if I was not able to use these plays to speak to and understand my own lived experiences or bridge connections to the communities I identify with. As scholars, we create the meaning in these texts as much as the author or their characters do. Just as Ariel builds a fluid world by shifting and rewriting his own body, I am writing this thesis this argument about the queer and trans ecological dynamics of the ocean in Shakespeare to engage in a little presentist LGBT+ world-making of my own. I am only able to make this trans and queer ecological meaning in this thesis because I am building off the fantastic work done both by blue studies and queer and trans studies scholars. In connecting these seemingly disparate fields, I hope to show how each might benefit from the other. Early modern trans and queer studies can gain from the re-naturalizing and reimagining of humans that happens in the ocean. Inversely, I believe blue studies can benefit from pushing its scope to include non-normative genders and sexualities as work from scholars like Mentz already lends itself well to this kind of project.

Overview of Chapters

This intervention seeks not just to make a positive splash in Renaissance studies but also to imagine alternative futures using overlooked aspects of texts from the past. My thesis will combine the work of the early modern blue scholars, Brayton, Duckert, and Mentz, with contemporary queer and trans ecologists, like Nicole Seymour and Mortimer-Sandilands. I will also rely on both early modern and contemporary scholars who help us process the ocean in and out of Shakespeare, as an environment that destabilizes and refashions humans and disrupts anthropocentric systems of knowledge towards queer ends.

My first chapter, “Shakespeare's Ocean as Queer Hyperobject,” lays the theoretical

foundation of Shakespeare's ocean as a queer space by connecting the work of Timothy Morton and Sara Ahmed.⁸ I tease out the connections between Morton's concept of the hyperobject and Ahmed's notion of queerness as a (dis)orientation to argue that Shakespeare's ocean itself is a queer hyperobject. Ahmed and Morton speak to each other's limitations in ways that prove useful for thinking through how the ocean operates as an environment and how we encounter that disorienting and transformative space. After detailing my understanding of queer hyperobjects in relationship to the ocean, I take this new theoretical intersection into two of Shakespeare's more watery plays, *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre* and *The Comedy of Errors*. I track how Shakespeare's characters are destabilized by the ocean towards radically queer ends away from heteronormativity and solid ground. These plays show us that not only do the characters experience the queer disorientation of the ocean, but so does the entire play itself. We, as audience members and readers, are forced to confront uncomfortable truths about our perceived stability and superiority on land. The following chapters of the thesis build from the theoretical interventions of Shakespeare's queer hyperobject ocean that arrives from combining Morton and Ahmed in this first chapter.

My second chapter, "Scuba Diving into Shakespeare's Ocean: Reckoning with the Early Modern Aquatic Animal," takes the lessons of the ocean as a queer environment in the previous chapter and processes the queerness of aquatic animals themselves. Shakespeare's aqueous creatures, and unearthly oceanic animals in general, disrupt human form and identity by reinforcing the failure of our inability to be underwater all while existing as queer aliens

⁸ I will put Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* with Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others*.

themselves. To uncover the aquatic world and animals beneath the surface of Shakespeare, I adopt Melody Jue's use of scuba diving as a way to "read from below" to develop my understanding of diving as a method of engaging in queer animal studies (32). Scuba diving as a mode of textual analysis divorces itself from contemporary strains of critical animal studies who claim that solidarity and companionship between humans and nonhumans are necessary and even possible and replaces it with an empathetic embracing of the abyss of differences between us and oceanic life. After constructing my ethical and textual practice of scuba diving, I employ the technique in two of Shakespeare's least watery plays, *Richard III* and *King Lear*. Instead of plumbing the ocean in these plays for lessons about humanity, I sink into these waters to read the ocean for the ocean's sake, to hear the lessons that aquatic animals are teaching us about themselves. Scuba diving shows us that the ocean is not a mirror for humanity but an opaque, alien world that upends our structures of embodied and procedural knowledge.

The third chapter, "The Oceanic Gender Nonconformity of *Twelfth Night*'s Cesario," moves away from strictly queer conceptions of Shakespeare's oceans to embracing the trans potential of this environment. I read the Viola/Cesario in *Twelfth Night* as a gender nonconforming character whose non-cisnormative gender embodiment is unlocked and propelled by their near-drowning in the ocean as a result of shipwreck. Cesario slides through genders and ultimately exists beyond a rigid male/female binary as they make their way on the shores of Illyria, disrupting systems of cisgender knowledge which seek to diagnose and normalize bodies. Turning towards the recent scholarly attention to trans identity in the early modern period, especially the work of Sawyer Kemp and Abdulhamit Arvas, I specifically move away from clothing as a traditional marker of gender identity to focus on the internal, natural change that

Cesario goes through. I counter claims that gender is a primarily social construction by insisting that Cesario's oceanic gender nonconformity is a biological, bodily process.

Committing to Alternative Futures

This entire thesis is based on, and takes its vigor from, presentist concerns about the celebration and protection of LGBTIA2S+ people. Queer and trans bodies, across time, have been subjects of disregard, loathing, and violence. Much of this hate relies on religious and social understandings of the queer body as abominable, that queers are against a natural, godly way of life. Rhetorical examples which define the queer and trans body as “unnatural” are too numerous and prolific to list here. However, consider examples like mainstream newspapers calling the AIDS pandemic “the gay plague” or Pope Francis, often referred to as the ‘cool pope,’ who in 2015 compared trans people and the idea of gender theory of nuclear weapons as these two wildly disparate things “do not recognize the order of creation” (“Pope Francis Compares Transgender People”). Queer and trans ecologies are based on subverting claims of the queer and trans body as against nature and unnatural. To locate the queer and trans body in nature and nature in the queer and trans body is a project of going “against ‘against nature’” rhetoric “toward radical ecological ends” (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 39). I start this thesis with this belief in the radical and generative potential of queer and trans ecologies.

This work strikes me as even more radical and even more generative in the early modern period. Locating the queer and trans body in Shakespeare's environments reaches back to plays from hundreds of years ago, confirming the idea that normative sexualities, genders, and bodies have always been and will always be natural. I find early modern texts exciting not only because they force us to reach back across time and reconcile past, present, and future at once, but also

because locating the marginalized body in Shakespeare attempts to wrestle these monumental plays from traditional, conservative scholars and readers who might find the project of queer ecologies anachronistic, unuseful, or only worthy of disdain. When you see the ocean's queerness across time and space, boundaries of human exceptionalism and control dissolve towards a more ethical and tender relationship with both marginalized humans and nonhumans. Bringing queer and trans ecologies to the early modern period helps us witness queer and trans bodies in nature hundreds of years ago as a way of envisioning futures where "nature" and "natural" don't only apply to "cisgender, heterosexual bodies" (Straube 229).

This thesis holds distinct importance to me since Shakespeare, particularly *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, actually helped bring me out of the closet during my undergraduate years. As I was struggling to carve out my identity, I witnessed these queer characters exploring themselves in a play written hundreds of years ago. Not only was the cast of *Midsummer* queer in the most expansive and radical of ways, but they were queer *in nature*, which meant everything to me. For years, I had been combatting thoughts that my personhood was unnatural, harmful feelings reinforced through the institutionalized fight against queer youth. Watching the young lovers, fairies, and rude mechanicals play in the forest outside Athens gave me an understanding of the electrifying naturalness of queer bodies that has informed my identity and work since. Shakespeare's characters and environments help us speak directly to our current moment where we are, horrifyingly, still entrenched in vicious anti-LGBT+ structural and personal violence as well as catastrophic climate change. In each chapter of my thesis, I plumb Shakespeare for lessons about how we might more ethically and compassionately find our way queerly in a world that isn't made for us.

CHAPTER I

SHAKESPEARE'S OCEAN AS QUEER HYPEROBJECT

In Act 1, Scene 4 of *Hamlet*, Horatio warns the prince, “What if it tempt you toward the flood...” (1.4.77). While Horatio’s apprehension might entice us to read the passage that follows as a commentary on the insidious, infectious nature of the Ghost, what undergirds his cautioning is essentially a deep fear of a deep ocean. He is worried that the sea will coerce Hamlet towards a suicidal leap off the cliff into dark waters. Horatio parallels the maddening draw of the ghost with that of the ocean as he continues, “The very place puts toys of desperation/... That looks so many fathoms to the sea/ And hears it roar beneath” (1.4.83-86). Hamlet’s seemingly rational friend constructs an image of the ocean that is violent, fervent, and disorienting. The fear here is not just in the real danger of a body hitting the surface of the water from a cliff. It is anxiety in the face of a petrifying, aquatic force that calls you towards it. Hamlet may have no choice after staring into the watery abyss but to drown himself in it.

Hamlet’s inevitable suicide should he stare into the dark depths raises questions about the ocean across time; Why is Horatio so terrified by this salty invitation? Where does this inescapable pull of the ocean originate and how does it operate? Is being tempted towards the flood always a death wish or can the ocean ever call you as a friend, maybe even a lover? These general questions lead us to open broad lines of theoretical inquiry into Shakespeare’s ocean as

an object and environment which overlap directly with queerness. We can begin to process Shakespeare's ocean as queer by thinking through how his characters envision aquatic environments as disorienting, fear-ridden spaces. Mimicking the actual waves of an ocean, Shakespeare's waters both pull in characters to them, as Horatio imagines, and push them away, as environments which escape human rationalization. Horatio's aquatic foreboding in this scene encapsulates the disorientation and anxiety that the ocean is mired in.

Two contemporary theorists, Timothy Morton and Sara Ahmed, should be put into conversation with each other and with Shakespeare to produce generative methods for conceptualizing the ocean as a space that queerly baffles human understanding. Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* posits his concept of hyperobjects. As the very first sentence of his book lays out, hyperobjects are things "that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton 1). These hyperobjects, he uses black holes and all the plastic ever produced as some examples, force us to accept an uncomfortable coexistence as they lay outside of our human-scale systems of knowledge. Morton tasks us with approaching our ecological crisis of global warming, itself a hyperobject, with a more creative and less anthropocentric ethic. Sara Ahmed's foundational book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Other* operates from a similar object-focused lineage as Morton but focuses less on the thing itself and more on our orientation to and relationship with that object.⁹ In unfolding her process of how we align and are directed, or redirect, towards

⁹ It is useful here to define the word object as it is a slippery term, especially in the context of object-oriented ontology (OOO). Although Ahmed's personal definition of the term does not come until halfway through the book, she helpfully explains that "[o]bjects are not only material: they may be values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles" - anything really" (86).

different objects, Ahmed defines queerness as both “a way of describing what is ‘oblique’ or ‘off line’” *and* “specific sexual practices” whose non-normative (i.e. outside of white, heterosexual reproduction and marriage) nature “involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world” (161). Morton and Ahmed, combined, generate ways to process the ocean across time. Aquatic environments nestle perfectly into the concept of hyperobjects as things that are incomprehensible to the spatiotemporal scales of humans. While Morton helps us classify the object itself, Ahmed gives us a way to think through our relationship with that object, to name the disorientation we feel in response to the ocean.

This chapter argues that we must connect these two seemingly disparate theories, Ahmed’s queer (dis)orientations and Morton’s hyperobjects, to better understand Shakespeare’s ocean as a queer environment that confuses and rewrites human knowledge and bodies. This connection helps us uncover the world under the surface of Shakespeare and brings the missing link of queerness to his waters. I will begin this exploration by spending time carefully connecting Ahmed and Morton with an eye towards how exactly they complement each other by addressing each other's limitations and witnessing the power of their two theories when combined. I will then take this emergent philosophy of queer hyperobjects into two of Shakespeare’s more watery plays, *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre* and *The Comedy of Errors*, to show how these works squarely reflect the ocean as a queer environment and object of intense disorientation. These plays show us that not only do the characters experience the queer disorientation of the ocean, but so does the entire play itself. We, as audience members and readers, are forced to confront uncomfortable truths about our perceived stability and superiority on land.

My reason for turning towards these plays is threefold. One, I love these plays for all of their quirks and eccentricities, from their wacky stage directions to their deliberately confusing plots and character identities. As I will argue later, the plays' oceanic entanglements ultimately produce these quirks and eccentricities. The disorientation that we feel when encountering the queer, hyperobject ocean is the same effect that produces the disorienting staging of *Pericles* and *Comedy of Errors*. Two, both are relatively under-represented plays in Shakespearean scholarship. The queer ecologies of both plays are begging to be explored as they as texts are shot through with not just oceanic environments but characters who are queered by those environments. Three, both are connected in that they ultimately understand the ocean as a queer hyperobject that destabilizes human bodies and systems of knowledge. Their oceans are as intimately knowable as they are dangerous and unrecognizable.

I have placed this chapter first in my thesis as the uncovering of the queer ocean in Shakespeare through contemporary philosophy undergirds the other two chapters that follow it. Morton and Ahmed provide the theoretical backbone for this thesis as the work in this chapter allows for more direct explorations of the queer and trans connections to the ocean in both the reading of queer aquatic animals in chapter two and gender nonconformity in *Twelfth Night* in chapter three. Ultimately, as the introduction of my thesis makes clear, I argue in this chapter that finding the queer ocean in Shakespeare is a project that is not just beneficial to the field of early modern studies, in bringing queerness together with non-terrestrial environments, but also in envisioning alternative presents and futures where both the queer body and ecological entity are treated with dignity and care.

Towards a Philosophy of Queer Hyperobjects

Timothy Morton's concept of the hyperobject allows us to witness the ocean operate as a thing and environment across time. As mentioned above, hyperobjects exist outside of a spatiotemporal scale that is comprehensible to humans. They escape our anthropocentric systems of knowledge about how the world operates. The sea receives little reference in Morton's monograph despite how perfectly the ocean fits into the principles of hyperobjects that he outlines. There are small glimpses of the ocean as he discusses garbage patches and icebergs as hyperobjects. However, the theory of hyperobjects is begging to be explored in connection with the ocean.

Morton further defines hyperobjects with five principles, viscosity, nonlocality, temporal undulation, phasing, and interobjectivity, to help focus on and confine a, by definition, slippery concept. The ocean, in Shakespeare and current times, nestles comfortably into all of these principles but especially as an object that is vicious and nonlocal.¹⁰ Morton explains that objects are vicious in "that they 'stick' to beings that are involved with them" (1). Our lives as humans are intimately bound up with the ocean as our bodies, knowledges, and experiences are overwhelmingly lived in connection to, or influenced by, the ocean. No matter how far inland we are, we eat from the ocean. We buy products that travel across the ocean. We watch *Jaws* and are

¹⁰ This chapter and thesis will focus most directly on these two principles, so I will make a brief mention here of how the ocean fits into the three other principles. First, the ocean temporally undulates in that it disrupts human conceptions of "spacetime" as it exists on a timescale stretched so many magnitudes that we cannot process its temporal existence (Morton 1). Second, the ocean is phased in that it occupies "a high-dimensional phase space that makes them impossible to see as a whole" or on a human-scale basis (Morton 70). The incomprehensible spatiotemporal scale outlined in other principles means that we also cannot comprehend the multidimensionality of the ocean. Last, the ocean is interobjective in that it "consists of interrelationships" between innumerable objects (Morton 1). The ocean is not just saltwater, but an unending conglomeration of animals, plants, submarines, colors, temperatures, zones, shipwrecks, etc.

then scared to swim in the local swimming pool. The list goes on endlessly. Despite this “vivid intimacy,” in that we think we know the ocean as a space, aquatic environments present us with a “sense of unreality” (Morton 32). The unending vastness of the ocean and its unending parts shake our foundation of reality.

Although the ocean sticks to us and pervades our everyday life, it is impossible to comprehend it as an object and environment because of its nonlocality. Morton explains the nonlocal principle as, “[A]ny ‘local manifestation’ of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject” (1). A wave on a beach in Wildwood, New Jersey is not the ocean. A view of the waters from the Pacific Coast Highway in California is not the aggregate of the world’s ocean. You can look at a specific point on the surface of the ocean, but you can never see all the ocean at once. When you scuba dive, which I will visit as a theoretical and ethical practice in the next chapter of this thesis, you are literally in it but still cannot grasp the eternity of the ocean. Even from outer space, you are only seeing the surface, a tiny percentage, of part of the ocean. We may think we can understand the ocean from our tiny vantage point, but there is no possible way for humans to witness all the ocean as a whole.

At the same time that Morton helps us better understand the ocean as a hyperobject, Sara Ahmed’s theorization of queerness as a phenomenology illuminates our reaction to those hyperobjects. The queer results of witnessing the alien ocean. Ahmed often bases her book-length projects on investigations and explorations of a singular word or idea. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed is primarily interested in the interrogation of the word ‘orientation.’ She literally begins the book with the question, “What does it mean to be oriented” (Ahmed 1)? Ahmed works through how orientation towards an object relies on the direction we face, which

puts into focus and reach certain objects and backgrounds and puts out of reach other objects. Also important to how we face certain objects and not others is the way by which we arrive at orienting towards an object and the way an object arrives at orienting towards us. This creates a line or horizon, a path in life that we all individually follow in which we can reach towards certain objects and are unable to reach towards other objects that fall outside of our point of view (Ahmed 55). Being oriented means feeling at home, knowing where one stands.

The real queer backbone of Ahmed's work, which has made it a pillar of modern queer theory, relies on her concept of disorientation. Heterosexuality is not simply a neutral, natural state of being where one orients towards a partner of the 'opposite sex.' Instead, it is something we actively construct and fall in line with through the repetition of bodily and social actions over time, both in this phenomenological sense and more literally in extending the familial line through marriage and reproduction. Queer desire, therefore, orients "slantwise" by bringing other objects, bodies, and experiences closer than would be allowed by straight ways of orienting (Ahmed 92). To arrive at queerness, we refuse to inherit and reproduce the line of compulsory heterosexuality and find queer moments of deviation that bring other lines and objects into our reach. Queer bodies may become disoriented as they wander off the line of compulsory heterosexuality, becoming oblique to the world. This concept of obliqueness as the foundation of queerness, when combined with Morton, unlocks our ability to witness the queerness of the ocean across time. The ocean, a hyperobject that permeates our lives and escapes our understanding, casts us into queer disorientation.

Before further articulating how Ahmed and Morton combine to create the concept of queer hyperobjects, I want to spend a moment exploring how each scholar has limitations that

become theoretical opportunities that the other can help us address. The main limitation of Morton's work on hyperobjects is the missing link to queer theory that is begging to be made. While Morton has written on queer ecologies on occasion, *Hyperobjects* makes little mention of queer theory, instead basing itself in the intersection of ecocriticism and OOO. By placing Ahmed into conversation with Morton's text, we are better able to grasp an incredibly slippery topic. Queerness helps articulate the response we have to hyperobjects beyond just general bewilderment to a thorough refashioning of humans as disoriented subjects when confronted with the ocean. Conversely, Ahmed's work in *Queer Phenomenology* is limited in its reliance on groundedness as the basis of (dis)orientation. When Ahmed assumes groundedness as the condition for orientation, the objects that we may turn towards or away from must also live in the same state of groundedness. Hyperobjects, as things that exist on, in, and often separate from, all environments, land, sea, air, space, transcend anthropocentric notions of groundedness as the ultimate state of knowing. Morton pushes Ahmed's work to consider prerequisites for knowledge, experience, and orientation other than just solid ground.

Combining the work of Morton and Ahmed at the intersection of the aquatic allows us to articulate both the queerness of the ocean object and how we are queered when brought into contact with that environment. The ocean, as a queer hyperobject, escapes our understanding while forcing us into obliqueness. To borrow language from Laurie Shannon's probing of *King Lear*'s cosmos, encountering the queerness of the ocean wrecks "our near-sighted fictions of stability" and impermeability (177). Hyperobjects dislodge dominant narratives of what it means to be human towards productively queer ends. If being oriented means feeling at home and knowing where one stands, the queer ocean will always disorient us (Ahmed 9). We never will

know where we stand because we will never find groundedness in the ever-moving saltwater. Queering hyperobjects names a feeling that is innate to us as humans but is hard to put a finger on, the same feeling that Horatio reflects in his warning to Hamlet. The ocean is disorienting and shocking at the same time that we feel unusually drawn towards it.

This work is especially powerful in Shakespeare's ocean as connecting contemporary theories back to plays from hundreds of years ago opens up a door to thinking about the disorienting force of the ocean across time. Morton and Ahmed's queer hyperobjects come alive in the early modern period because it is a moment, as I discussed in the introduction to my thesis, where the ocean was just beginning to be explored and processed. Lessons of disorientation and nonlocality become even more acute in a time when there was almost no exploration of the ocean except the surface. The depths of the ocean were even more of a mystery than they are today, where only 10% of the ocean as a whole and 35% of U.S. coastal waters have been mapped in 2021 (National Ocean Service). Both *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and *The Comedy of Errors* understand the ocean as this queer mystery that seizes our attention but supersedes our knowledge of the world. Ahmed offers a powerful and tender way forward through this obliqueness, echoed in the plays I will discuss, which relies on seeing disorientation as a door to queer possibility. Disorientation is a way to point somewhere else and refashion ourselves in the face of our previously 'oriented' ways, to make what is "here" become strange" (60). These two plays offer us, then, not just a window into a new way to understand the ocean as a queer hyperobject but an opportunity to witness how Shakespeare's oceans actively participate in creating alternative visions of the world where both aquatic environments and queer humans are allowed to thrive.

Pericles's Queer Alien

Pericles, Prince of Tyre is the pinnacle of Shakespeare's oceanic plays, with only *The Tempest* reaching close in terms of how much the ocean is present. Almost the entire plot of the play either takes place on the ocean or is directly influenced by the ocean, from the near-drowning of Pericles to Thaisas's washing up on Ephesus. Due to its unparalleled oceanic connections, early modern blue critics have produced generative scholarship on this play.¹¹ However, what might we as ecocritics be overlooking in a play so thoroughly saturated with the ocean? The first, and most obvious for this chapter and thesis, is that queerness is an under-discussed aspect of the ocean in the play. For as poetically mesmerizing as we write about Shakespeare's ocean, there has been little translation of those images and meanings into terms of queer theory. The second part of the early modern ocean being overlooked is, funnily enough, the ocean itself. As I will discuss with particular attention to aquatic animals in the second chapter, the ocean is so often abstracted to metaphor. For example, Suparna Roychoudhury explores *Pericles's* ocean as a metaphor for perturbing human emotions, one that shows us "it is possible to both lose and discover oneself in adversity" (1037). It is not to say that Roychoudhury or others who create abstractions of the oceans are wrong to do so. Indeed, they are plumbing the ocean for generative, non-ecocritical scholarship. To take Shakespeare in a queer ecological direction involves reading the ocean for the ocean. We make meaning out of the waves instead of seeing the waves for themselves. Uncovering the queer hyperobject that is *Pericles's* ocean helps us correct these two overlooked aspects of Shakespeare's bluest play.

¹¹ See Steve Mentz's chapter "Fishing: *Pericles*" in *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, Lowell Duckert's chapter "Introduction: Enter, Wet" from *For All Waters: Finding Ourselves in Early Modern Wetscapes*, and Duckert's article "*Pericles's* Deep Ecology" for some examples.

The ocean in *Pericles* is full of queer contradictions, a liminal space capable of enriching men and stripping them of life. This play wades right into the middle of the rearticulation of the early modern ocean as an alien God-space and symbol of freedom (Mentz 69). It is caught between these two perceptions, as characters benefit from and are ruined by saltwater. For both Cerimon and Pericles, the sea has the potential of providing riches. They see the ocean as a space to literally and metaphorically plunder for riches which reflects how early moderns were starting to understand “oceanic liberty” (Mentz xii). The ocean became the backdrop for globalization as the catalyst for long-distance trade and travel, an economic boon (Mentz xi).¹² Early moderns began to ignore their disorientation instead of thinking of the ocean as a business opportunity. Cerimon, in examining the mysterious chest that washes up on his shore, orders, “Wrench it open straight./ If the sea’s stomach be o’ercharged with gold,/ ‘Tis a good constraint of Fortune it belches upon us” (3.2.62-64). This is an ocean capable of delivering untold riches from its depth. There’s no fear in these lines, but an intense desire to investigate aquatic mysteries. The idea of a drowned treasure is consistently reflected in Shakespeare’s conceptions of the ocean. As Clarence is imprisoned towards the beginning of *Richard III*, he relives his oceanic nightmare;

Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,

Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,

All scattered in the bottom of the sea.

Some lay in dead men’s skulls. (1.4.27-30)

Clarence imagines an ocean bottom filled with horrific but bounteous treasures, the kind of

¹² For more on the ocean as an enricher in the early modern period, see Brayton’s explorations of significance of London’s fish markets in his article “Shakespeare's Fishponds: Matter, Metaphor, and Market” (140,159).

treasures that Cerimon hopes have been belched onto his shore. Cerimon and Clarence, although the latter does so in a more petrifying way, reflect an attitude that the sea is a place to gain financially from. Following Shannon Kelley's work on coral, this attitude tracks with early modern "England's emergent dependence on transoceanic commerce, which included harvesting the treasures of the sea" (139). Not only is the ocean a site for economic potential to Cerimon, but it is also categorically human possessing both a stomach and the ability to burp. This is a very personal, known ocean. The lord attempts to bring the ocean to his level by humanizing it, ruling over it, and plundering its riches. As I will argue later, this project ultimately flounders, because this personal, "local manifestation" is just one tiny piece of the alien ocean (Morton 1).

Before moving to parts of the play where the ocean is regarded as a daunting, disorienting force, we must understand that its waters do at times operate as a friend and guide to Pericles. After the first shipwreck, the prince enters the scene "*wet*," a drenched seal torn from his clothing. He curses the ocean for having "bereft a prince of all his fortunes" and worldly goods (2.1.9). Pericles thinks he has been robbed by the waves, missing how the sea is holding on to his father's armor to later benefit him. Mentz reads the netted armor scene as the fishermen "salvaging Pericles's royalist and humanist identity" (73). Here, clothing becomes a metaphor for the fishermen returning his colonizer status and is interestingly devoid of connections to the ocean. Instead of reading this reclamation of the armor as a fisherman-centered occurrence, I would push us to think about how the sea returns the armor as a gift. Pericles's rusty appearance is a piece of why both Thaisa and Simonides admire him so quickly. They feel pity for the harrowing journey the Prince has gone through to win Thaisa's hand (2.3.94-95). The ocean seems to act as a friend in the form of rust that makes the play's romance possible.

Reading the rusted armor as an aquatic gift given to Pericles which wins him grace with Thaisa allows us to see how the ocean sticks to the prince as it aids his family-building. As Pericles weds and Thaisa becomes pregnant, all in one of Gower's choruses, the ocean is behind it all. Here we begin to see how the hyperobject sea fits into Morton's principle of viscosity. The ocean soaks this relationship. The lovers will always be stuck to it as it sticks to them. It may seem that the idea of stickiness is the antithesis of slippery water. Although Morton's principle of viscosity works theoretically with the ocean, it's not the best experiential description of liquid worlds. We might, then, liken this principle to a buoy in the ocean. The ocean laps at the buoy and makes it twist and turn. While the buoy may be a separate object from the water it sits on, its entire existence and experience concern the ocean.

Pericles, like most of the characters in the play, are buoys in the water as the ocean throws them about and constantly reorients them. In this light, the rusted armor is a gift with controlling strings attached. This tracks with Mauss's foundational essay on gift exchange where he argues that gift-giving "obliges a person to reciprocate the present that has been received" (9). As Pericles was given the gift of rusted armor, he must reciprocate it by, unknowingly, allowing the ocean to structure his family and relationships. How, then, can we read ocean here as queer if, while it submerges Pericles, it is aiding in marriage and reproduction? First, the gift of rusted armor from the ocean that leads to his marriage exists outside of a hetero-capitalist economy. Pericles doesn't win his bride through fancy, costly shields like the other knights. Instead, he is queered by rust, winning through the armor that counters dominant understandings of what it means to be a suitable mate. Second, while the relationship is indeed heteronormative on its face, the ocean's vicious control over Pericles's life queerly disorients the prince. If, following Ahmed,

being oriented means knowing where you stand, how can you know where you stand if the ocean is always flooding you, directing you (9)? As the ocean's cosmic reach disorients and reorients Pericles towards Thaisa, even a straight marriage can be queer. Humans are not in control of their bodies and paths.

Ultimately, *Pericles*'s insistence that the ocean presents an unknowable and unfathomable danger overwrites moments where characters feel like they have a personal connection with this space. While some characters benefit from the waves under the guise of potential economic gain and family building, this is a limited view of the ocean, a false "local manifestation" (Morton 1). The ocean inspires a "sense of unreality" in *Pericles* as its intimate connection washes away into an environment that spells peril and disorientation (Morton 32). The earliest attitude towards the ocean that the audience of the play receives is that of the "alien-God space" (Mentz, 69). The sea is a realm of certain death. Helicanus first mentions the ocean in his reaction to Pericles's voyage; "So puts himself unto the shipman's toil,/ With whom each minute threatens life or death" (1.3.26-26). The ocean has the potential to take a person's life at every moment. Its threat is omnipresent. Directly after this comment, the lord Thaliard relishes in the certainty of the Prince of Tyre's death; "He 'scaped the land to/ perish at the sea" (1.3.29-30). Even if the ocean helps Pericles win the hand of Thaisa, it causes untold and unmeasurable havoc on his life, constantly throwing him towards danger.

The ocean is constructed as a space not only of incredible danger but also incredible uncertainty as it escapes anthropocentric models of knowing. Each moment a traveler is on the sea is an anxious gamble for their life. Gower, acting as Chorus, echoes this anxiety of constant, unknown danger as he describes the ocean as a place "[w]here when men been there's seldom

ease” (2.Ch.28). Many of the characters of *Pericles* viscerally understand Mentz’s lesson that the ocean is the lasting “place on earth that remains inimical to human life” (5). This anxiety about the uncertainty of the ocean derives, in part, from it being “nonlocal,” that while you can see some of the surface and waves, you will never be able to see it as a whole object (Morton, 70). You can never be certain about the ocean. This allows us to see how Cerimon’s understanding of the ocean from earlier ultimately fails on all levels. Not only does the trunk not contain any gold, but his attempt to humanize the ocean relies on one tiny perspective of an ocean he can’t even really see. Cerimon is certain he can contain the ocean through his analogy of it to the human body, but the ocean can never be contained as a queer, nonlocal hyperobject.

Pericles is struck with fear by the “alien, God-space” ocean, a vector of disorientation that completely rewrites our understanding of space and the boundaries of environments. He shouts from his vessel right before Thaisa ‘dies’,

The god of this great vast, rebuke these surges,

Which wash both heaven and hell! And thou that hast

Upon the winds command, bind them in brass,

Having called them from the deep! (3.1.1-4)

Pericles perceives the ocean as being not only responsible for hazardous storms and biting wind but also as a force capable of reaching both heaven and hell. He is so frightened because the sea feels large enough to reach beyond disrupting earthly weather towards influencing other planes of existence. Our ability and knowledge as humans pale compared to the power of oceanic forces. Our prince witnesses, or at least thinks he witnesses, the ocean as a “cosmic force that exerts an invisible yet palpable influence over distant bodies” (Brayton, *Shakespeare’s Ocean*

91). There is no knowing this ocean as it demolishes the rigid partitions between land, sea, and air which our human modes of knowledge hold on to for stability and comfort. Here, again borrowing from Shannon's reading of *King Lear*, Pericles's "near-sighted fictions of stability" are shattered, both literally, as he soon loses his wife to childbirth during the storm, and psychically, as he imagines saltwater breaking through the limits of the natural world (177). The ocean can reach past the normative spaces of the earth and human thought as a disorienting, incomprehensible, queer alien.

Our Failed Oceanic Dominion in *The Comedy of Errors*

The Comedy of Errors demonstrates humans are incapable of understanding and having dominion over the ocean. While *Errors* is a much earlier play in Shakespeare's career as compared to *Pericles*, its characters perceive the ocean more as a symbol of freedom than alien danger. The characters in this play, like Cerimon, equate aquatic environments with profit as the sea becomes a tool for exploration and enabling trade and economic gain. Humans in *Errors* believe they have control over the ocean and that they can harness the water for their exploits. These characters, as we will see, ultimately fail to enact their aquatic dominion and are constantly turned away from their intended paths in life. A majority of the explicit oceanic material is front-loaded in the first act of the play, with Egeon recounting his family's horrific shipwreck. This tragedy, though, queerly disorients this family and, therefore, much of the action in the rest of the play. Like I will argue in the last chapter about Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, the shipwreck in Act 1 saturates the entire play. Egeon and Antipholus of Syracuse see the salt in their eyes and feel the water on their body as they prophetically reflect notions of the queer hyperobject ocean hundreds of years before Morton and Ahmed. The ocean has ultimate control

over *Errors*, forcing shipwrecks that split families and forcing them into queer disorientation and self-refashioning. This reading of *Errors* will further explore the ocean's "plasticity of meaning" we have unpacked in *Pericles* and cement the lesson that we cannot fully understand or control aquatic environments though we may buoy in them (Brayton 13).

Shakespeare's characters in *The Comedy of Errors* comfortably assume power over the ocean as a device for lucrative mercantilism and travel. Egeon, while spilling his story to the Duke, recalls, "Our wealth increased/ By prosperous voyages often made/ To Epidamium" (1.1.39-41). The ocean is how humans can carry out trade, transforming it from an alien to a submissive landscape through which you can amass wealth. Their misunderstanding of the seas has moved beyond an uncomfortable intimacy to assumed dominion over these spaces. The men of Ephesus, in particular, are thought to have sovereign power over the waves and tides. In dishing with Adriana while angrily awaiting her tardy husband, Lucianna scolds,

There's nothing situate under heaven's eye

But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky.

The beasts, the fishes, and the wingèd fowls

Are their males' subjects and at their controls.

Man, more divine, the master of all these,

Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas. (2.1.16-21)

Lucianna reflects this deeply patriarchal worldview and asserts that humans are the masters not only of all the creatures on earth but also over the lands and waters themselves. Enacting this brand of human exceptionalism over the ocean takes "oceanic liberty" to its fullest extent (Mentz xii). Not only does Luciana seemingly not fear the danger and alien status of the ocean, she

thinks men hold supremacy over it. Similarly, as Angelo anxiously waits to pay his debts to the Second Merchant, he accosts Antipholus of Ephesus, “Nay, come, I pray you, sir, give me the chain./ Both wind and tide stays for this gentleman” (4.1.45-46). Angelo echoes a worldview where men rule the ocean, reflecting so deep an entrenchment in mercantilism that he believes the tides wait for this gentleman to do his business. This human supremacy over the seas is based on a rejection of the ocean as a hyperobject. Characters in *Errors* consistently reduce the ocean from being incomprehensible and uncontrollable to merely a tool.

Two of the Syracusan outsiders, Egeon and Antipholus, attempt to understand their relationship to the ungovernable ocean in ways that the Ephesians generally fail to commit to. Egeon is, in contrast to Pericles who is brought to his wife by the ocean, witness to the destruction of his family-building at the hands of the sea. In pleading his story for the Duke, Egeon painfully recollects,

For, ere the ships could meet by twice five leagues,
We were encountered by a mighty rock,
Which being violently borne upon,
Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst;
So that, in this unjust divorce of us.” (1.1.100-104)

The ocean wreaks havoc on this family by splitting them in two. However, Egeon’s use of the word divorce drives home the queerness of this tragic shipwreck.¹³ By evoking a marital term, we can see how this father understands the ocean as not just causing ruination but reorienting

¹³ Shakespeare consistently uses the word divorce as a marital term throughout a number of his plays. We can think of when Polixenes orders, “Mark your divorce young sir” (*The Winter’s Tale* 4.4.490-491), or the entire divorce plot of *Henry VIII* where the word appears eight times.

them towards new lives away from marriage. Steven Swarbrick reads Egeon's opening lines to the Duke as emblematic of the play's suggestion for a "radical alternative to unifying 'flesh' of the marriage plot" (27). To combine Swarbrick's reading with Ahmed, the ocean forces Egeon and Emilia to follow new lines and orient to new objects, new radical alternatives as they lose their shared marital life. Egeon grasps the ocean is exerting queer control over all over his family's lives by de facto divorcing him from his wife. As he continues his origin story, Egeon refers to his new family as "shipwrecked guests" as they are taken aboard a nearby ship (1.1.114). They have been forever queerly altered by the ocean. In following both Mentz's explorations of shipwrecks and Karen Raber's rearticulation of shipwrecks/ being shipwrecked as "posthuman condition," we can see Egeon here engaging with his newly destroyed status as a married human man (Raber 33). He understands that he and his family have been shipwrecked and shaken by the ocean. They have been "touched everywhere by the inhuman elements of wind and water" and pushed towards new lives apart (Raber 33).

Antipholus of Syracuse, like his father, also breaks from the Ephesusian mold of believing men can control the ocean. Egeon's perspective of the ocean as all-power, all-influencing makes sense. He saw his family shipwrecked right in front of him. Antipholus,¹⁴ though, was just an infant in this critical moment. However, after constantly roaming from shore to shore for five years, he has spent enough time anxiously traveling the ocean to understand its status as a sovereign, queer hyperobject (1.1.131-136). Antipholus's famous water drop speech,

¹⁴ I will trim off the "of Syracuse" title going forward as I will not discuss the other brother in this section.

discussed thoroughly among blue studies scholars,¹⁵ reflects his shift towards a queerly posthuman understanding of his status as a human. He pines, “I to the world am like a drop of water/ That in the ocean seeks another drop/... In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself” (1.2.35-40). Important here is that he repeatedly envisions his personhood unraveling in the water. As Holly Dugan writes, this play “stages a frighteningly dissolvable self” (216). Antipholus reflects Morton’s argument that running up against the viscosity of hyperobjects is both an intimate and “uncanny” experience (28). Unlike Luciana’s men, Antipholus sees himself as lacking any dominion and agency over his situation, being bereft of his lost family, caused by the ocean. He loses himself, dissolves, in the face of the hyperobject that makes his situation feel so impossible.

Antipholus regains another identity through the ocean in the wreck of his unraveled personhood. In rebuking Adrianna’s insistence that he is her husband, he pleads, “In Ephesus I am but two hours old,/ As strange unto your town as to your talk” (2.2.159-160). As Egeon understands the ocean’s power through marital terms, being divorced from his family, Antipholus understands it through terms of birth. He is reborn in the sea as he travels, entering new lands in infancy.¹⁶ Each time he is on the sea, he experiences a shift in identity and starts on a new trajectory. The ocean reorients his life every time he encounters it. In Dan Brayton’s blue reading of *Errors*, the scholar summarizes that “the ocean is intricately involved in human history.... Its briny power both threatens human life and offers the potential for rediscovery and renewal” (65).

¹⁵ See Steve Mentz’s chapter “Swimming: *The Comedy of Errors*” in his book *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean*.

¹⁶ There are some interesting connections to trans experiences in this speech that are worthy of attention. My last chapter will connect gender nonconformity and oceanic environments which deeply resonate with this notion of the unraveling, refashioned self.

Indeed, the outsiders Egeon and Antipholus of Syracuse are among the few characters in the play that take these lessons to heart. They understand, or at least try to understand, the dominion that the ocean holds over their lives. Antipholus and Egeon embody the generative results of queer disorientation when faced with the hyperobject ocean. The “here” of pretending man can rule the ocean becomes “strange” to them as they are reoriented towards radically different paths in their life as a result of shipwreck. They know they are always wet, buoying in the ocean as the ocean floats in them.

The ocean manipulates each character and interaction in *Errors*, even if Luciana, Angelo, and other Ephesians don't comprehend it. Every misunderstanding, every misjudgment, every mistaken identity is a result of the ocean's influence stemming from the initial shipwreck. Salt water queerly disorients the relationships and encounters of the play. As I discussed above, the ocean breaks Egeon's heterosexual marriage plot towards reorienting ends. Following Holly Dugan's reading of the “monstrous hybridity of apish men and bestial women,” there is a deep queerness in how everything is mixed up in the play; “classes, genders, species, and environments” (221). The ocean causes these mix-ups, from the initial splitting of Egeon's family, that instills a sexual power and anger in women, like Nell,¹⁷ that the men can only comprehend as witchcraft. Following Ahmed's double sense of “queer,” the ocean also queers each character in the play as they all become oblique to the world. Brayton reads Antipholus of Syracuse as a “merman of sorts, a human who has been transformed by the sea” (94). From that definition, we can witness every character in *Errors* (and indeed *Pericles*) as a mermaid.

Whether or not these characters recognize it, encountering and traveling through the queer ocean

¹⁷ For more on the queer erotics between Dromio and Nell, see Dugan (217-222).

radically reorganizes their lives, pushing and pulling in waves that destabilize individual identity and personhood. We feel viscerally the viscosity of Shakespeare's hyperobject sea. His characters can never escape the ocean. *The Comedy of Errors* is not just a play about mistaken identity, it is a play about the ocean's sovereign, "cosmic agency" and our inability to hold dominion over aquatic environments (Brayton 94).

Externalizing Queer Hyperobjects Beyond Shakespeare's Characters

Understanding the lessons that queer hyperobjects present us with is integral to being a more engaged audience member and reader of Shakespeare's plays. *Pericles*, which is perhaps part of the reason it often flies under the radar among other, more popular Shakespearean works, is incredibly difficult to follow. Both time and place jump unfathomably, leaving us to catch up and figure out where along Pericles's journey we are. Not only do the rapid spatiotemporal changes make the play hard to follow, but they also make it hard to stage. Gower specifically begs for us to have a strong imagination to conjure the stage like a ship that is undergoing massive travel and tumult between scenes (3.Ch.58-60 and 4.4.1-4). You can't meaningfully engage *Pericles* without having an imagination capable of blending time and space in confusing, difficult ways. Similarly, in *The Comedy of Errors*, two sets of twins make for an amazingly complicated story to follow from both a visual and mental standpoint. *Errors* also requires a similarly strong imagination in that the shipwreck, the main driving incident behind the splitting and adventures of Egeon's family, happens in an unstaged flashback. Shakespeare's audiences need to be able to be queerly disoriented by the ocean as his characters are. I argue you can't meaningfully engage with the range of Shakespeare's aquatic plays without an oceanic, queer imagination.

When you have an oceanic, queer imagination, not only is there an opportunity to be a more engaged scholar and audience member of Shakespeare's oceanic plays but the freedom to be a more empathetic inhabitant of the earth. Witnessing the ocean's queerness across time and space causes boundaries of human exceptionalism and control to dissolve towards a more ethical and tender relationship with both marginalized humans and nonhumans. Central to Lowell Duckert's exploration of the ocean is "the question of who is and who is not allowed to speak is also the question of who is and who is not excluded from a given ecology" (40). Recognizing the queerness of Shakespeare's saltwater then becomes a radical project of returning the queer body, voice, and perspective to the ocean. I have spent much time thinking about the ocean as a disorienting force, so let's end by recounting Ahmed's insistence that disorientation is not a bad thing. Being disoriented means we have an opportunity to "'point' somewhere else" and see how "what is 'here' becomes strange" (Ahmed, 160). The world has been forced to be dry and straight. The queer hyperobject ocean prompts us to envision alternative presents and futures where queer humans and ecological lifeforms are celebrated and cared for. Through exploring Shakespeare's ocean, we can see ways to engage in more ethical relationships with all inhabitants of the world, human and nonhuman. Let's continue to make this world queer and wet.

CHAPTER II

SCUBA DIVING INTO SHAKESPEARE'S OCEAN: RECKONING WITH THE EARLY MODERN AQUATIC ANIMAL

Diving down into the aquatic world below the surface of the ocean is as close as humans can get to visiting outer space. Throughout my childhood, I took up scuba diving as a passion, going on between 10-15 dives every summer when I was off from school. I would go on trips and dive twice every day. Any time I wasn't under the water or sleeping, I would frantically study my PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) texts to prepare for my licensing exam at the end of the vacation. By the time I was 16, I was fortunate enough to have secured an Advanced Open Water Diving license where I got to learn diving extracurriculars like underwater navigation and photography. Night diving was one of the most horrifying experiences I ever had as the only light available was from a small flashlight attached to our gear. Looking back at my time diving as a teenager, what I remember most vividly is not the excitement in experiencing the beautiful locations we dove in but the feeling of being totally immersed in an alien world. Everything about being under the ocean differs from land. The creatures, gravity, feeling, perspective, communication, and movement are all disorienting. This activity transports us to a world that is not our own but a space of uneasy connection with the alien. Scuba diving is the queerest thing you can do in the ocean.

Spending time underwater illuminates not just the alienness of aquatic creatures and the ocean itself but how you, as a human, are alien to the ocean too as we are incapable of existing in the ocean without significant technology. Our unsuitability to the ocean and failure as humans is contrasted directly with the suitability and thriving of bizarre oceanic life. I can call to mind the visceral fright of looking up from the ocean floor at 100 feet of water above you, teeming with fish, plants, and microbes content in their environment, knowing that if you don't equalize pressure in your ears, you could damage your ears or worse.¹⁸ When you dive, the further you descend, the faster your oxygen tank is depleted, a reminder that while the depths are home to countless lifeforms, they are no place for the human body. You need to spend a significant amount of time coming up from the depths. Whales, dolphins, and other marine mammals can dive and surface as they please, but humans must rise in cycles of ascending 25 feet and then waiting for three to five minutes to avoid decompression sickness and nitrogen poisoning. Diving can be incredibly painful and taxing on the body. We are not adapted to the pressure and liquidity of the ocean. There is an oozy quality to scuba diving itself, especially the sometimes painfully slow ascension that feels like a sticky entanglement with the ocean.¹⁹ The ocean is holding you and inhibiting you while you are trying to come back to terrestrial life.

While recent advancements in technology, like scuba gear, underwater cameras, etc, have

¹⁸ This is something that happened to another driver on one of my trips. He did not properly equalize his ears when we were descending, and we flew home the same day. The rapid change in pressure caused by going from under the ocean to up in the air on the same day exacerbated the painful condition. He lives with permanent, partial hearing loss as a result of acute ear barotrauma.

¹⁹ Diving feels like the ritualized enactment of Morton's principle of the viscosity of hyperobjects. Morton outlines hyperobjects as viscous in that "they 'stick' to beings that are involved with them," inspiring a "vivid intimacy" and "sense of unreality" in their witness (17, 32).

made it possible for us to envision stories of humans existing under the surface, Shakespeare understood the lesson that the ocean is the last “place on earth that remains inimical to human life” (Mentz, *At the Bottom* 5). Early moderns certainly could exist *on* the ocean for an extended period of time as travel in ships was transforming the ocean into a “symbol of freedom,” but anything under the surface was obscured both literally and metaphorically (Mentz 69). As I explored in the previous chapter of my thesis, Shakespeare portrays the depths of the ocean as at once completely incomprehensible and utterly transformative. Shakespeare’s underwater spaces are thoroughly queer in that they are so consistently disorienting to both the characters in the plays and their audiences. Spaces like this force us to recognize how, for humans, the ocean is “an oblique world” where we can never find home or solid ground (Ahmed 161). This oblique queerness is as much a part of the space itself as it is about the creatures that inhabit that space. I am interested in using this chapter to think through how Sara Ahmed’s sense of queerness can expand our understanding of the ocean as an object and environment to involve the queerness of oceanic lifeforms. Shakespeare’s aqueous creatures, and unearthly oceanic animals in general, disrupt human form and identity by reinforcing the failure of our inability to be underwater all while existing as queer aliens themselves.

This chapter of my thesis will use scuba diving as a device for engaging in critical animal studies. When we dive into Shakespeare’s marine environments, what is ultimately a queer practice, we locate the alien animal and alienated human. I will begin by defining the practice itself. I will explore why scuba diving is a particularly useful methodology for reading Shakespeare’s oceans, the theoretical and material stakes for this practice, and how scuba diving productively pivots from contemporary critical animal studies. My notion of scuba diving as a

method takes inspiration from Melody Jue who recently made an argument for scuba diving as a humanities practice that changes “our techniques of reading and our assumptions about the spatiality of interpretation” by training “the diver to read from below” (164, 32). What happens when we read Shakespeare from below? What can the early modern ocean, particularly Shakespearean ones, teach us about animals that current oceans cannot? After establishing why scuba diving is a necessary way to move through Shakespeare, together we will dive under the surface of two plays by visiting their underwater scenes and thinking about the queer animals that populate them. What creatures do we find in the depths of his oceans? What does meeting aquatic life on its home turf show us about the queerness of the ocean? As there are no literal underwater scenes in Shakespeare, I will visit two plays to construct a briny, submerged reading, focusing on *King Lear*’s sea monsters to Clarence’s nightmare in *Richard III*, to witness what scuba diving through Shakespeare’s imagined ocean reveals. This process is not about plumbing the depths of the ocean for lessons about our triumph and achievement as humans. Instead, I want to read the ocean for its own sake, to listen intently to the lessons aquatic animals are teaching about themselves. Scuba diving shows us that the ocean is not a mirror for humanity but an opaque, alien world that upends our structures of embodied and procedural knowledge.

This chapter is distinctly interested in exploring plays that fall outside of what we could call Shakespeare’s oceanic cannon. My thesis imbeds itself in this cannon. These are the plays that are easily identifiable as dealing directly with the ocean. *Pericles*, of course, is the pinnacle of this subsection of plays as so much of the action takes place on the water. The ocean openly advances plot points like Thaisa’s washing up on Ephesus and Pericles’s drifting to Mytilene. The other plays that I focus on in my thesis, *The Tempest*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *Twelfth Night*,

either involve marine travel and settings or, as I've argued, are speculatively influenced by the ocean. Finding the aquatic in plays that fall outside of this "oceanic cannon," like *King Lear* and *Richard III*, pushes us to recognize that the ocean is an integral part of every Shakespeare play, even if it is not directly a part of the setting or plot. Aquatic animals and environments seep into the imaginations of Shakespeare, his characters, and his audiences with near-ubiquity. My goal in choosing plays here is in part to disrupt the whole premise that there are oceanic and non-oceanic Shakespeare plays. We cannot contain our discussion of the ocean to a few select works in the same way that we cannot contain the ocean as a queer hyperobject that rewrites who we are as inhabitants of Earth. Immersing ourselves under the surface of plays that seem more land-based will force us to recognize that every work of Shakespeare is saturated with saltwater. The oceanic cannon bursts open.

Constructing a Scuba Diving Methodology

Scuba diving is a useful activity, for reading texts and for life, because it disrupts anthropocentric notions of humans as superior lifeforms. This disruption occurs as we are forced to run up against our own failure in the face of oceanic creatures more adept at living in water than we ever could be. My sense of scuba diving as a methodology, which I will outline further in a moment, builds from Melody Jue's recent monograph, *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater*. For Jue, the ocean is an unplumbed space to find media that begs for a "milieu-specific analysis, calling attention to the differences between perceptual environments and how we think within and through them as embodied observers" (3). The process of attuning ourselves, our theories, and our modes of textual analysis to respond to underwater diving is one of disorientation and requires a fundamental reworking of terrestrial customs that are familiar to us

humans (Jue 6). Jue uses diving as an experiential starting place,²⁰ as I have done in this chapter, and later in the book employs it as a practice of interpreting texts while in the habitus of the ocean. I find Jue's work in this book especially useful for its understanding of oceanic disorientation and "cognitive estrangement"²¹ which reads to me as fundamentally queer. While there is mention of the innate queerness of the ocean,²² I know we can go further in linking the textual and experiential experience of scuba diving with queerness. I will use Jue's argument for this new ocean-centric humanities practice to construct my own sense of what scuba diving offers us. I see scuba diving as a way to focus in on the queerness of oceanic animals, the way they shockingly slip outside of our traditional, terrestrial systems of knowledge, in ways that are generative for both Shakespearean studies and contemporary modes of critical animal studies. Scuba diving entails the experience of coming as an outsider to an alien world where every creature is so queerly disorienting, only to realize we are the aliens.

My theory of scuba diving as a method of analysis is built upon three premises. One, scuba diving is a textual practice that forces us to find queerly alien oceanic animals that are easy to forget and hard to confront. Two, our running up against queer creatures in the ocean positively pushes against strains of contemporary critical animal studies whose goal is to break down the theoretical divide between humans and nonhumans. Three, scuba diving is a

²⁰ For example, "As a diver, you become alienated from the land in the very process of becoming able to breathe comfortably deep underwater and have to spend time reversing that process to go safely back to sea level elevation" (Jue 164).

²¹ "I see diving as a method of cognitive estrangement that makes visible the terrestrial biases that have calcified in the way that we figuratively speak about the world" (Jue 163).

²² "From naturally occurring transsexual fish to asexual jellies and colonial organisms, sea creatures destabilize our expectations of heteronormativity, individuality, and perception across species" (Jue 28).

particularly useful historical method for Shakespeare's time as it recreates the lost world of the early modern ocean, excavating little gems of analysis to construct an underwater environment that Shakespeare's audience and we know little about.

Premise One: *Scuba diving is a textual practice that forces us to find queerly alien oceanic animals that are easy to forget and hard to confront.* When we think about aquatic animals, in theory and in media, we most often direct our focus to larger marine mammals like whales and dolphins and creatures like sharks and octopuses. The reason for this is twofold. The first is that these species are sexier and more dynamic than other forms of oceanic life that look like less, consume less, and demonstrate less range of activity. There is a reason why there is a *Shark Week* and not a *Sea Urchin Week* on the Discovery Channel. The static, faceless visage of many ocean animals doesn't capture the popular imagination in the way a great white jumping out of the water can. The second reason relates to access and perspective, which makes larger animals the object of our aquatic attention. It is much easier to see, film, and try to understand an animal who breaches the surface of the water, especially when they do so as a singular entity. When a whale surfaces, we see similarities to our own way of breathing, our own terrestrial knowledge. It is easier to process one creature, as in the whale, compared to animals that work in synchronicity or completely under the water, like a school of fish. The relative singularity of larger marine animals allows us to have a more direct connection as opposed to trying to form a relationship with an entire coral reef.

The bias towards higher oceanic lifeforms becomes even more acute when we wade into the early modern period where one could barely interact with aquatic life save for what swam to

the surface or was caught in a net, sexier oceanic animals like whales and dolphins.²³ Now, it is not to say that provocative work isn't being done on dynamic species. For instance, Steve Mentz productively posits that the dolphin represents ideas about "hybrid or posthuman bodies and also the flexible notions of embodied cognition," and Dan Brayton argues that Shakespeare uses whales to transgress "conceptual boundaries such as those between land and sea, man and fish" (Mentz "Half-Fish" 42, Brayton "Princely Whales" 61). My point is that the over-attention to species that are more dynamic, more mammalian, arguably more human, by critics like Mentz and Brayton only renders other aquatic life yet more invisible. When non-mammalian ocean animals, like fish, appear in scholarship, they often come to us literally and metaphorically out of water. The *Routledge Handbook of Shakespeare and Animals* edited by Karen Raber and Holly Dugan, for example, features aquatic life in only two out of twenty-three chapters. Of these two, Brayton's chapter thinks about fish as a food source and as "rhetorical figures for the political ecology of the marketplace," while Rob Wakeman's chapter uses fish "to investigate how Shakespeare negotiates between the lurid and the chaste, between virtuous sexuality—even abstinent asexuality— and reprobate sexualities" (Brayton "Fishponds" 31, Wakeman 270). How do we move past the metaphorical value that aquatic animals often hold to thinking more literally about their presence in the plays? I believe that scuba diving as a method of analysis forces us to confront all forms of aquatic life, from the largest whale to the smallest plankton, in a recognition of how diverse creatures fill our understanding of the ocean as an alien space. It can

²³ See Steve Mentz's "Half-Fish, Half-Flesh: Dolphins, The Ocean, and Early Modern Humans" and Dan Brayton's "Royal Fish: Shakespeare's Princely Whales." Both are chapters included in the collection *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature* edited by Vin Nardizzi and Jean Freerick.

be uncomfortable to witness the queerness of aquatic animals which becomes more acute when many species of oceanic animals do not surface. Air-breathing is the last characteristic we share with creatures like whales. We must direct our focus to creatures that do not share terrestrial similarities with us.

Premise Two: *Our running up against aquatic creatures in the ocean productively pushes against strains of contemporary critical animal studies whose goal is to break down the theoretical and material divide between humans and nonhumans.* Oceanic creatures present a problem for critical animal studies as a whole but especially for scholars who argue for building community, relationships, and shared connection with nonhumans. Few critics ever take up aquatic life in their scope, because animals that live in the depths of the ocean frustrate claims that the boundary between humans and animals is a dissolvable, anthropocentric construction. Take, for example, Jacques Derrida's foundational lecture, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, in which the French philosopher ponders what it feels like to stand naked in front of his cat. The shame that comes from being naked is unique to humans, as animals are never ashamed of their nudity because nakedness is their default state. Humans wear clothes in an attempt to divide themselves from animals, thus birthing the shame of nakedness. Beyond the exploration of shame, this scene is used to process the animal gaze. When Derrida's cat looks at him, the cat's gaze subverts the othering that humans have inflicted on animals. When a cat gazes at a human, it is a reminder that the human is indeed an animal themselves, what Derrida calls the "abyssal limit of the human" (12). The cat, this terrestrial, familiar mammal, becomes the test case for the supposed breakdown of the animal and human divide. Does this scene work with a fish, most of which don't bother to look at us? What is the shame in being naked in front of a sea urchin or

oyster who has face, no eyes, and, therefore, no gaze? This trend continues into contemporary strains of critical animal studies, especially scholars focused on community-building like Valarie Plumwood. In her influential *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood focuses on creating “a mutual and cooperative relationship with” earth others through “concepts of care, solidarity, and friendship” as a turn away from destructive and violent anthropocentrism that posits humans as the most valuable lifeforms (164, 155). I feel sympathetic to this movement towards building community and empathy with the nonhuman to subvert our destruction of animals and environments. However, Plumwood’s work, which revolves around land-based ecosystems and lifeforms, runs ashore when put into conversation with oysters, coral, and other smaller oceanic animals that are so incomprehensibly alien to us humans.

In the sparse instances when animal studies work does include aquatic life, water-based animals are often dissatisfyingly assumed to exist and operate exactly like terrestrial life. Take, for example, J.M. Coetzee, South African novelist and vocal proponent of animal welfare. In his brief meta-fictional text, *The Lives of Animals*, which condenses his views on animals others, his protagonist Elizabeth Costello argues that “there are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination” we feel concerning animals (Coetzee 35). To ‘prove’ her point, Costello continues, “If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life” (Coetzee 35). Such a claim, while intellectually stimulating in itself, ignores a wide swath of nonhuman beings who differ in bodily operation and environment. We can begin imagining what it would be like to be a chimpanzee because we live on the land where they live and they resemble us in appearance and functionality. What, though, can we possibly understand about the

oyster, who lacks a nervous system, has a radically different form than us, and lives in an environment incapable of supporting human inhabitants? By aligning a chimpanzee and oyster in the same thought experiment, Coetzee ignores the abyss that stands between us and the aquatic creature. He hopes to create a sympathetic argument for diminishing the human and animal divide that ultimately cannot grapple with holding both the alien nature of ocean lifeforms and finding inroads to empathy at the same time.

Using scuba diving as a guide to textual analysis involves a dismantling of claims that understanding between humans and all animals is possible and constructs the idea that we can still build empathy with creatures that look and live radically different from us. It is not the fault of one individual theorist that oceanic creatures have not been meaningfully deemed as worthy of speculation but an overlooked avenue of generative exploration endemic to the field of critical animal studies. To recuperate the missing ocean animal, one needs to dive into texts and work to accept the queerness we are confronted with.

Premise Three: Scuba diving is a particularly useful historical method for Shakespeare's time as it recreates the lost world of the early modern ocean, excavating little gems of analysis to construct an underwater environment that Shakespeare's audience and we know little about. This chapter, and my thesis as a whole, is interested in both gazing backward, in that I am trying to uncover aspects of the early modern ocean that have been overlooked and underdeveloped, and looking forward, as I believe Shakespeare's aquatic environments hold the key to envisioning alternative futures where diverse identities and lifeforms are embraced as part of the natural fabric of life. This attitude, of one that is both grounded in historical and presentist conceptions of blue spaces, is common among the range of early modern "blue cultural studies" scholars that

I have discussed in my thesis, namely Steve Mentz, Dan Brayton, and Lowell Duckert. For example, Mentz recently produced a framework for thinking through aquatic environments in connection with the future of climate destruction. In exploring the phenomenological experience of swimming, Mentz argues, “[t]o swim requires giving oneself over to the alien environment. A poetics of buoyancy would focus on the temporary stability in which we recognize the swimmer’s skill” (“After Sustainability” 589). Swimmer poetics entails a process of recognizing the human body’s vulnerability and incompatibility with the ocean while attempting to stabilize and survive. As is Mentz’s modus operandi, swimming ultimately not only works as a tool for understanding Shakespeare’s ocean, as he accomplishes in work on *The Comedy of Errors*,²⁴ but a way to progress through the presentist concern over the impending doom of climate change. Incorporating the alien ocean into our terrestrial lives is vital for Mentz, as “landed life increasingly resembles conditions at sea” in its instability and danger (“After Sustainability” 590). Mentz’s concept of swimming does have its limitations. Swimming on the surface of the water can only offer us so much knowledge about the ocean below. What Mentz overlooks, and what I think scuba diving can help with, is expanding our understanding of the world that is under the surface of the water and witnessing how that world is separate from humans.

Scuba diving adds a wrinkle to early modern blue scholarship by insisting that the ocean and its inhabitants are queer, a slippery habitat and concept that we humans can never fully wrap our minds around. These spaces are fundamentally de-anthropocentric. While Mentz’s concept of swimming is bound up with care for the natural world, its presentist attitude is focused on how

²⁴ See Mentz’s chapter, “Swimming: The Comedy of Errors,” in his book *At The Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean*.

we as humans navigate the waves and catch lessons for life back on land. What view we do have of the ocean from a swimmer's viewpoint is inherently hierarchical as we float on top and look down onto this liquid world. Although we can never escape anthropocentrism, I believe that scuba diving as a method of oceanic analysis inches us away from terrestrial modes by asking us to explore a world that is not meant for us and that exists in separation from the land we are familiar with. Reading Shakespeare in this way adds another layer of defamiliarizing queerness as we essentially are piecing together an alien world that both we and the early moderns themselves know very little about. Diving is a process of excavating tiny moments in the plays that are traditionally abstracted as metaphor and artistic flourish. We must grasp at whatever slick pieces of evidence we can to reconstruct this world. In doing so, I will also engage in trawling the deep ocean for anthropocentric visions of the future. However, I do so hoping these lessons also force us to decenter our status as beings of ultimate knowledge and accept that we will never have reign over the ocean. My goal here is to read the ocean for the ocean's sake, not as a mirror for our human nature. I implore us to take seriously any mentions of aquatic environments and animals and to think through what blue moments uncover about the ocean of then, now, and the future.

Clarence's Nightmare: Fearing the Early Modern Ocean

Having outlined the intervention that is scuba diving as a method of literary analysis, I will spend the rest of this chapter exploring two short vignettes which, while pulled from plays that aren't overtly blue, uncover bits of Shakespeare's oceanic world. The ocean as a hyperobject is too queerly slippery for us to understand completely. I ask us to read these scenes more literally, with the ocean as the forefront object of attention. I will introduce each scene by briefly

recounting how scholars have read them in the past. In most instances, the ocean and aquatic animals become a vehicle for abstracted metaphor. Saltwater is not saltwater but a representation of the River Styx. Sea monsters are not sea monsters but a representation of our fear of chaos. Metaphorical readings, while useful, provide a pivot point for us to go deeper with our scuba diving methodology. We plumb the depths of Shakespeare to understand our current and historical relationship with the queer ocean and its animals.

For our first dive, we will sink into the ooze of *Richard III*. In a play that is mostly set in anonymous London urbanity, Clarence's oceanic nightmare is out of place. Trapped in the Tower of London, Clarence replays his horrifying aquatic vision to the keeper:

Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wracks,
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon,
Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
All scattered in the bottom of the sea.
Some lay in dead men's skulls, and in the holes
Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept-
As 'twere in scorn of eyes - reflecting gems,
That wooed the slimy bottom of the deep
And mocked the dead bones that lay scattered by. (*Richard III* 1.4.25-34)

Clarence constructs a vision of an aquatic environment through this dream that is as visceral as any of the scenes that "actually" take place on the water with slimy sea floors and fish who feed on gem-studded skulls. Wolfgang Clemen's meticulous unpacking of this play in *A Commentary*

on Shakespeare's *Richard III*, first published in 1968, approaches Clarence's nightmare with a similar impulse that a blue ecologist might by posing the question, "[W]hat, we may ask, is a dream about drowning, the sea and the sea-bed, doing in this scene?" (69). Clemen then answers his own question about the mysterious placement of the ocean in this play with:

[W]ater is associated with death: Souls were carried over the River Styx to the world of the dead, and Clarence must pass through the medium of water before he arrives at that other kingdom. He is conveyed from the lighter element, from the 'air' of life, into the ominous, oppressive, fatal element of water and is held there in an unfamiliar deathlike world. Water thus seems to represent a transitional stage in the process of disembodiment, in the passage from life to death... There is symbolism too in Clarence's vision of the sea-bed as a huge grave in which lie a thousand wrecks, a thousand corpses. The skull-gem images serve, of course, to remind us of the transitoriness of life. But beyond that, they point to the falsity of worldly standards. (69-70)

For Clemen, in line with more traditional modes of scholarship which seek to decode the metaphor of Shakespeare, this dream scene represents Clarence's impending death and movement to the next world. The ocean functions as a vehicle, maybe even a mirror, for both Clarence's and the audience's fear of death. I don't want to say that Clemen's reading of this scene as a metaphor is off-base or inaccurate. Indeed, his explanation of the nightmare provides us with a foundational understanding to build from. However, I think that we can take the impulses here and move away from metaphor towards oceanic reality. Scholarly assertions in the passage above, such as likening water to the River Styx or the symbolism of the sea-bed, treat the ocean as an abstract place. Clemen, though, identifies some key, experiential associations

with water that are useful to pivot from when considering this scene, especially with an added lens of queerness. Namely, the ocean is queerly disorienting as “an unfamiliar deathlike world” that is “ominous, oppressive,” and “fatal;” a space where humans literally can experience the “process of disembodiment” (69).

When we sink down into Clarence’s dream, we see that fish-bitten skulls are not just an abstract metaphor for the mortality of humans but fear of literal oceanic death. In other parts of my thesis, I focus on the jewels and gems that replace the skull’s eyes as a reflection of early moderns’ changing relationship with the ocean towards a place to exploit financially, both in trade and in “harvesting the treasures of the sea” (Kelley 139). Here, scuba diving as a textual practice first draws our attention to the interaction between the drowned human figures and the creatures that populate Clarence’s imagination. In this nightmare, humans literally become fish food as aquatic life picks clean the bodies of the shipwrecked sailors. Brayton’s scholarship on fish has worked through both the implications and ramifications of humans eating fish, including an exciting argument about the metaphorical power found in the “olfactory volatility of fishy flesh,” and fish eating fish, as a commonplace “analogy of human social behavior” (“Shakespeare’s Fishponds” 25, *Shakespeare’s Ocean* 160). Continuing to the next logical place in fish/human consumption, what do we learn from Clarence’s nightmare ocean where fish eat humans? Regardless of the human fascination with interacting with the ocean, it is an environment of mortal danger for us. This scene, in particular, shows us an inversion of the anthropocentric hierarchization that places humans at the top of the food chain. Turning humans into fish food forces us to recognize our bodies and minds are vulnerable. Coming to terms with this ugly truth entails an understanding that not only do humans not fully belong in the ocean but

the disorientating reality that we are less capable and less dangerous than the fish we so readily capture for dinner. Oceanic animals are not only an epistemological problem but a problem for the human body. These aliens that we know so little about can turn us into fish food in an instant.

It is important to note that fish eating the flesh off of drowned sailors isn't just a far-fetched nightmare. It is a documented, horrifying truth. Early modern reports of drownings and shipwrecks construct eerily similar nightmare oceans to Clarence's. Consider the account of a colossal flood in 1613 that resulted in mass drownings in Devonshire [illustration below].

Edward Allde and John Beale detail the horrific crisis:

[W]hat outrageous inundations, what vnresistable ouerflowings of mercilesse waters we haue had, nor man, nor historie recording the like (since the generall flood,) wherein many hundreds of acres of pasture and erable land, was (in little space as it were) turnd into a maine Ocean, that the fishes (the



inhabitants of the sea) floating in their new made regiments, did feede on the drowned carkases of men, women, children, and beasts. (*The last terrible tempestious windes and weather*)

The Devonshire report acts as a real-life portrayal of Clarence's nightmare as humans become carrion for aquatic life. While the buried bodies included in the image above may remain in their place, the figures flailing in the ocean will eventually sink to the seabed and get picked apart by fish. The drownings related by Allde and Beale are not the result of some great shipwreck but a landslide into the ocean. Hillary Eklund has provided us a framework for the engaging practice

of reading Shakespeare literally by investigating “the margin where land meets sea, and where local, national, and transnational interests intersect” (349). This convergence of these two environments is chaotic and messy. Eklund ultimately argues that thinking through littoral spaces, while destabilizing, “simultaneously affirms uniqueness and interconnectedness, foregrounding a littoral vision of Great Britain’s evolving role in the changing tides of the late sixteenth century and suggesting a model for adaptive, global citizenship amidst the political and environmental precarities of the twenty-first” (349). Though this theorization is productive, we should add to Eklund’s conversation a deep-seated fear that strikes us when the ocean threatens to encroach on land in ways that aren’t as placid as a shoreline. The ocean has a way of invading the land, through tsunamis, landslides, and hurricanes, and reminding us that even the ground that we stand on is not solid.

Fear is at the center of both Clarence’s nightmare where we are consumed by fish and the Devonshire report where that sea will come to land before that same death. In particular, a fear of queerness. The ocean overwhelms us by forcing us to confront the unknown, the mysterious environment and its equally bewildering lifeforms, and the danger that human bodies are placed in when confronting those mysteries. Sara Ahmed, whose work on queer (dis)orientation is foundational for this entire thesis, explores the phenomenology of fear and other emotions in ways that are helpful to define the reaction fish-bitten carcasses inspire in us across time. Fear, for Ahmed, is “an unpleasant form of intensity” which “relates to the future. Fear involves an *anticipation* of hurt or injury” (*Cultural Politics of Emotion* 65, emphasis original). We know so little about aquatic animals except that they can kill us in myriad ways in an instant. Oceanic environments and animals, therefore, become a site where we place our fear of death and danger.

Brayton explores this similar anxiety about oceanic environments in his work on slime in *Richard III* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. He writes of Clarence's dream, "In this nightmare description of the sea floor slime bridges the boundary between life and death and also that between water and ocean bottom. As such, it is occulted and amorphous, a state of matter not to be trusted, fundamentally fungible and deeply creepy" (Brayton *Shakespeare and Slime* 7). We fear objects, environments, and lifeforms that do not conform to, or slip outside of, our traditional, terrestrial modes of knowledge. Ironically, fear "works to secure the relationship" between the object or body of fear and the body which is afraid (Ahmed 63). Though we know the ocean is filled with danger and death for us, we are still drawn towards it. Clarence's nightmare, in its lush description of an oozy seafloor, communicates this fascination, this pull towards the ocean at the same time that it holds only a violent end for him. Ahmed's conception of fear is bound-up with futurity in that "fear projects us from the present into a future" (65). *Richard III* and Clarence's fear show us a future that is opposed to human life.

Scuba diving to a sea-bottom filled with fish-bitten skulls runs up against critical animal studies arguments for an increased notion of solidarity with the nonhuman. How do you build community with aquatic life that is essentially indifferent to your presence, except when they can feed on your corpse? You cannot find solidarity, at least the same kind of solidarity we can with a cat or dog, with lifeforms that are utterly terrifying and harmful. The only community that might stem from our encroachment into the sea is after our death. I am thinking here of the biological wonder of the "whale fall" where whale carcasses fall to the ocean floor and "provide a sudden, concentrated food source and a bonanza for organisms in the deep sea" (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). The whale body serves as an incredibly important resource for

deep-ocean animals as it “can support rich communities for years to decades” by creating a “new food web” and providing “energy to support single- and multi-cell organisms and sponges, thus adding to the ocean's food chain” (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).²⁵ In Clarence’s mind, we are the whales.²⁶ His nightmare shows us that the best we can hope for is that our bodies may sustain a community of organisms feeding off our remains. Spending time in *Richard III*’s ocean implores us to move away from insisting on community with nonhumans towards a theory of non-anthropocentric, non-land-centric coexistence. We cannot operate from a point of view that collapses the difference between land animals and aquatic animals. This type of solidarity requires us to work through how oceanic creatures are fundamentally different from, and often dangerous to, us and the fear that flows from that realization. Once we have diagnosed this fear, we can begin to rethink ways to treat ocean animals with greater respect while still holding our vast differences in mind.

King Lear and Oceanic Myth-Making

King Lear, like *Richard III*, is a play that highlights how the ocean presents both early moderns and us with an epistemological problem as a space that is impossible to comprehend. Clarence’s vision is filled with the nightmarish yet plausible realities of oceanic death in shipwreck and fish-bitten corpses. *King Lear*, in contrast, is filled with fabled aquatic tyrants, creating an image of the ocean as marvelous as it is terrifying. Laurie Shannon, among others,

²⁵ If you would like to watch a video of this fascinating event, type “whale fall” into YouTube and watch away! I would particularly recommend the videos titled “The Stages of Whale Decomposition” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XZHms1fX4Y>) and “Sharks Feasting on a Whale Carcass” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7t1WguYJyE>).

²⁶ For further reading on the connection between humans and whales, especially with the history plays, see Brayton’s chapter “Royal Fish: Shakespeare’s Princely Whales” in his book *Shakespeare’s Ocean*.

has shown us how rainy, tempestuous weather drowns the play. Lear is queered when the storm shatters anthropocentric, “near-sighted visions of stability” (Shannon 177). Pivoting from queer readings of the environment in this play which focus on weather and rain, I would like to bring forth two moments where characters in *King Lear* engage in oceanic mythologizing as they write monsters into the deep sea.

Glancing mentions of sea monsters show us that even in a play that is fundamentally about land,²⁷ we still can find scenes of aquatic engagement and imagination. The first reference to oceanic leviathans comes from Lear himself as he rebukes Goneril for asking him to demobilize half of his soldiers. In getting ready to flee to Regan, he screams, “Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,/ More hideous when thou sow’st thee in a child/ Than the sea monster!” (1.4.270-272). There is nothing worse than Goneril’s insubordination in King Lear’s mind, even the monstrous beasts of the ocean. The second reference to imagined creatures comes from Albany. Mirroring the language of his wife’s father, he scolds Goneril for her treatment of Lear,

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses,
It will come:
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep. (4.2.57-61)

Both conjurations of sea monsters come from the same impulse of attacking Goneril’s perceived

²⁷ For an example of scholarship focusing on *King Lear*’s engagement with earthly environments and the politics of land, see Stuart Elden’s article, “The Geopolitics of King Lear: Territory, Land, and Earth.”

mistreatment of the king. Albany's speech is, however, more evocative than Lear's as creatures are connected to the inevitable decline into human cannibalism if Goneril and her sister would go unpunished for driving Lear insane. *King Lear*, although it does not contain the only references to sea monsters in Shakespeare,²⁸ opens up a door for parsing out what the waters of ancient Britain were actually like.

These two passages, like most traditional readings of Shakespeare's ocean, have been explored as an overt metaphor for human nature. F.P. Wilson, 20th-century scholar and editor of early modern British literature, focuses on Albany's "monsters of the deep" speech as a symbol of inhumanity that traces Shakespeare's textual lineage. Wilson identifies several increasingly older sources that Shakespeare might have been influenced by to ultimately argue that Shakespeare is drawing not on one specific text, but a confluence of interpretations of the "proverbial view that a society without God would be one in which there would be nothing to prevent the big fish eating the little fish" (Lewis 77). Albany's scolding of Goneril is dramatically heightened in this interpretation to move beyond just her mistreatment of her father as an isolated incident towards a broader "reflection upon the nature of man and man's place in society and in the universe" (Wilson 20). Sea monsters are, to scholars like Wilson, not sea monsters but a symbol of our human fallibility that demonstrates Shakespeare's engagement with foundational texts of the medieval and Renaissance periods. The religious symbolism of aquatic

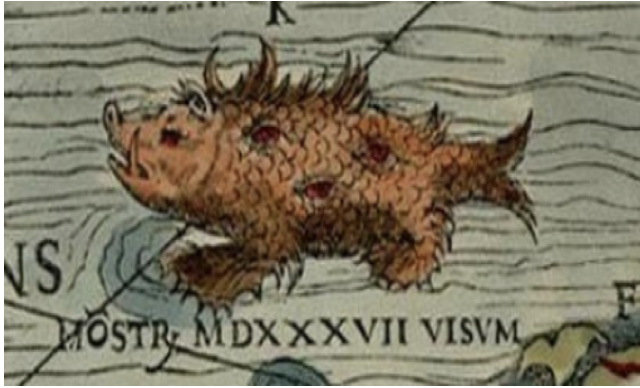
²⁸ Other mentions of sea monsters include: *Cymbeline* - "Th' imperious seas breeds monsters; for the dish/ Poor tributary rivers as sweet fish" (4.2.42-43), *The Merchant of Venice* - "With no less presence but with much more love/ Than young Alcides when he did redeem/ The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy/ To the sea-monster" (3.2.56-59), *Troilus and Cressida* - "He's grown a/ very land-fish, languageless, a monster" (3.3.275-276), and, most repeatedly, *The Tempest* in reference to Caliban.

leviathans in the scenes above continues to be iterated on as we use the ocean to learn about ourselves. For example, Sean Benson recently argued against the scholarly notion that *King Lear* is a play without or against God. In a move towards reclaiming *Lear* as a deeply religious play, Benson witnesses Albany's frustration at "the moral evil he sees" as an understanding of "the idea of transworld depravity," that we as humans would sin any world where we are created (327). In both Wilson's and Benson's readings, the ocean becomes a metaphorical mirror for human nature, a continual abstraction of the ocean as an actual environment.

Interpreting Lear's and Albany's speeches with a scuba diving methodology calls us to answer the question; What happens when we explore the ocean materially in *King Lear*? A dive into the waters of ancient Britain shows us an aquatic environment filled with creatures that we know almost nothing about. Fortunately, none of the animals in our ocean across time are the cosmic horror genre of leviathans that could rise hundreds of feet out of the water to decimate a fleet of ships. Instead, we find an unending multitude of animals. Some are creatures which are shocking in size, appearance, or movement, but none are true monsters. The play contains brief mentions of lower orders of aquatic life. Kent, in disguise, exposes his trustworthiness in that he eats "no fish" and the Fool charges Lear to cry out "as the cockney did to the eels when she put 'em i' ²⁹ paste alive" (1.4.18, 2.4.136-137). The characters of the play communicate in these lines that their understanding of actual oceanic creatures ends at the animals which can be caught and devoured, the fish and the eel. Lear's and Albany's sea monsters present us with an uncomfortable truth, we know so little about the ocean. They demonstrate "[t]he impossible

²⁹ Other mentions include the Fool questioning, "Canst thou tell how an oyster makes his shell?," Edgar saying, "Hopdance cries in Tom's belly/ for two white herring," and a gentleman replying to Kent, "As pearls from diamonds dropped" (1.5.25, 3.6.32-33, 4.3.25).

fantasy of knowing the unknowable, reaching the bottom of a bottomless place” (Mentz, xiii). To dive in these waters expecting fantastical colossi and only finding fish and small eels highlights our epistemological failure to know the ocean.



The depths of the ocean are inhabited by creatures to which we have no land comparison, so we must indulge in creating stories of horror and fantasy to complement our lack of knowledge. It is useful to witness how the “monsters of the deep” in *King Lear*

track with the early modern mythologization of imagined oceanic leviathans, partly due to their cartographical depictions. Perhaps the most famous example of sea monster illustrations comes from Olaus Magnus’s *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum*. This map is littered with oceanic beasts ranging from a serpent attacking a ship to a whale that looks inexplicably like a pig [pictured above] to a lobster large enough to hold a man in its pincer [pictured below].

In his fantastic exploration of sea monsters on medieval and Renaissance maps, aptly titled *Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps*, Chet Van Duzer explains cartographers included these images for mostly material reasons. Perhaps the most baseline and transparent explanation is that illustrations made maps more exciting to look at. Van Duzer relays that monsters were a serious “financial consideration” for artists as they made the maps “richer, more sumptuous, more extravagant” (11).



More abstractly, including sea monsters on maps reflects and expresses “an increased general interest in wonders and marvels” (Van Duzer 12). Monsters allowed early modern cartographers to explore their culture’s changing relationship with the ocean and to recognize the alienness that aquatic environments still embodied. I see Magnus’s maps and the *King Lear* fantasies engaging in the same kind of epistemological soothing. Drawings and stories about sea monsters give us a site to funnel our anxiety and fear at the lack of our knowledge about what is under the surface.

Contemporary speculative film reflects the same impulse of broad cultural anxiety that guides Magnus and Shakespeare to spin myths of oceanic monsters. There are countless entries in the subgenre of oceanic horror movies where a team of underwater explorers or workers stumble upon the whole gamut of alien monsters.³⁰ The heart-pounding 2020 film *Underwater*, which features Kristen Stewart battling horrors of the deep, is a shining example of the continuation of fear of the oceanic unknown that *Albany* and *Lear* play out. In the film [the poster of which is to the right], an earthquake rocks a team of



³⁰ Some of the must-watches in this sub-genre of speculative film include: the 1998 adaptation of Michael Crichton’s novel *Sphere*, Sean Cunningham’s *DeepStar Six* from 1989, and George Cosmatos’s 1989 classic *Leviathan*.

scientist-engineers who are working at a mining facility at the bottom of the Mariana Trench, the deepest oceanic trench we currently have documented. As they attempt to escape their underwater hell, they are besieged by deadly aquatic aliens twice the size of a human. In one of the most fantastic twist reveals in modern science-fiction cinema, the last surviving team member shoots a flare to scare away these creatures to reveal the gargantuan Cthulhu in the obscure watery darkness who is spawning the smaller creatures. *Underwater* shows us that even in 2020 we are still creating myths of oceanic monsters and the devastation they wreak if we ever come into contact with them. The supposed distinction between Renaissance England and contemporary times is much thinner than we thought.

Across time, forms of entertainment, like Shakespeare's plays and science fiction movies, create stories of aquatic creatures as fantastical beasts to repair our wounding lack of knowledge about them. These types of stories present audiences with two responses. The first, and more outwardly destructive, is that we treat actual oceanic creatures with violence. We have witnessed this kind of incendiary reaction with *Jaws*. After this 1975 classic was released in theaters, "legions of fishermen piled into boats and killed thousands of the ocean predators in shark-fishing tournaments" in what has since been dubbed the "*Jaws* effect" (Fletcher). This senseless murdering of sharks is unfounded, as sharks account for around 10 deaths a year worldwide while mosquitoes are responsible for over 400,000 (Florida Museum, World Health Organization). The *Jaws* effect, while ridiculous, demonstrates that we would rather kill what we do not understand than actually try to process that valley of difference. The other type of response to stories about oceanic monstrosities is that we are soothed in our failure about the aquatic environments. Stories, as found in most recent oceanic sci-fi, where scientists stumble

across a leviathan at the bottom of the ocean teach us it's better to not explore these areas else we risk death. We can sit at home or at the playhouse content that our lack of knowledge about aquatic animals is not a failure of human achievement and embodiment but a natural aversion to danger. To pivot from this epistemological soothing, we should work towards a vision of solidarity that both accounts for the differences between land and water and that leaves ample space for the unknown. We must avoid the mythologizing of creatures we cannot see or understand and focus on processing the human discomfort that mythologizing stems from. The image of a cannibalistic sea monster in *King Lear* or myth of Cthulhu lurking at the bottom of the Mariana Trench, while downright terrifying, is easier to swallow than the unknown abyss that the queer ocean of reality presents us with.

Coda: Post-Apocalyptic Oceans in Shakespeare

I would like to end here by briefly diving into what is perhaps the most preposterous Shakespearean film adaptation ever made, Phil Nibbelink's *Romeo and Juliet: Sealed with a Kiss*. As readers might be able to garner from the movie's poster [pictured on the next page], *Sealed with a Kiss* is a 2006 animated remake of the Shakespeare play where the Capulets are Steller sea lions and the Montagues are California sea lions.³¹ Every other character is some form of aquatic life, including Friar Lawrence as a sea otter, a comic relief clownfish, and a shark, cleverly named Sharky. The film is, to put it bluntly, bewildering. Nibbelink shockingly devotes a significant portion of the runtime to full song and dance numbers, including one where the lovers sing to each other while ludicrously twirling around in the cosmos. Other campy,

³¹ At the time of writing this chapter, the entire film can be viewed for free on YouTube by searching its title. While I will not call it a must-watch, I genuinely think it is worth your time if not for a few cheap laughs and aquatic antics.

perplexing choices include Mercutio who interrupts the movie’s action to rattle off oceanic pun-based ‘jokes’ upwards of six or seven at a time,³² a scene where the two lovers reenact the famous “I’m flying” *Titanic* scene, and a fumbled, ham-fisted thematic inclusion of race where the brown Romeo is looked down upon because of his color by the white Capulets.³³ The film’s campy and tongue-in-cheek nature leaves some of the most puzzling questions for the audience unanswered, namely, “Why remake *Romeo and Juliet* with aquatic creatures?” and “Why not focus on a more ocean-based play like *The Tempest* or *Pericles*?”



Beyond the campiness of the humor and musicality, this movie shows us that thinking with or through aquatic animals, especially in Shakespeare, is innately a queer project both on the level of scholarship/production and in the way we must approach oceanic organisms. When creatives enter the water, they seem to be flooded by their attachment and entanglement with the ocean. Nibbelink, who was a big-time animator at Disney working on projects like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and then directly with Steven Spielberg, turned to independent filmmaking and produced *Sealed with a Kiss* almost by himself over the span of five years. He is credited as the writer, producer, director, animator, and editor of the movie, and his characters are voiced

³² Some choice lines include, “If a seagull flies over the bay, does that make it a bay-gull?,” “Why did the fish swim into the sand-bank? To get some sand-dollars!,” and “Why wouldn’t the clam share his toys? He was shellfish!”

³³ During the recreation of the balcony scene, Juliet even sighs, “What’s in a color? A fish of any other color would still smell as sweet. Oh, Romeo. If only you could change your color!”

predominantly by friends and family.³⁴ Nibbelink's dedication to this film's creation feels like a queerly campy and excessive overinvestment in creating a Shakespearean blue world.

These ridiculous cartoon aquatic creatures invoke queer disorientation as they present the audience with a posthumanist view of the world.³⁵ Shakespeare's characters, pillars of humanity, are replaced with aquatic animals, forcing us to recognize the nonhuman in these plays and our own world. *Sealed with a Kiss* is also literally a post-human film in that there are at no point human characters on screen, every lifeform animated is an oceanic animal. The only glimpses of humans that come to us are the remnants of two sunken ships that the seals have dance numbers and parties on.³⁶ There are interesting parallels between Nibbelink's movie and the *King Lear* production Laurie Shannon recently explored in her article "Silly Creatures: *King Lear* (with Sheep)." In Missouri William's now-famous stage production that Shannon discusses, a sole human performs both a meta-director and actor attempting to cajole sheep into their roles as the supporting cast of *King Lear*. The "silliness" of the production prompts reflections and questions about the "tragic and ridiculous" nature of us humans in the eyes of these livestock animals, something that Shannon invigoratingly explains as a "kind of species-gloss on humanity" (222, 226). Placing one human in serious performance with a flock of sheep allows these animals to

³⁴ Some of the voice actors include Nibbelink's children which leads to this eerie, uncomfortable auditory experience in some scenes.

³⁵ Carey Wolfe explains posthumanism aims to "fully comprehend what amounts to a new reality: that the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects. And this is why, to me, posthumanism means not the triumphal surpassing or unmasking of something but an increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited" (47).

³⁶ Mercutio, at one point, fantastically bastardizes the famous Shakespeare line to "partying is such sweet sorrow."

hold a mirror up to us, forcing us to recognize our failure, our sheer inability to find stability and avoid tragedy, as a species. I want to place Nibelink's *Seal with a Kiss* in the same trajectory of disrupting anthropocentrism that Shannon's exploration of Williams's production engages in. This movie takes the concept of many sheep performing Shakespeare alongside a sole human actor to its logical conclusion; What if there were literally no humans in a production of Shakespeare?

Sealed with a Kiss, in all of its campiness, emblemizes the ethic that scuba diving as a practice of analysis calls us to. Nibelink, perhaps unknowingly, presents a post-apocalyptic adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* where all the human figures have faded away. The above-ground landscape of the film is sparsely animated, usually with a toned-down brown palate and little greenery, while the underwater scenes are filled with numerous aquatic creatures and more diverse color choices. Sea-lions shatter the mirror that the sheep hold up to humanity by confronting us with a world in which oceanic life flourishes in the absence of our species. I see this confrontation as reflecting the premises of what scuba diving into Shakespeare is all about. The film includes the entire range of oceanic animals, from the sexy and dynamic shark to smaller animals like crabs and coral. There is no insistence here that humans and ocean animals need to find community with one another. There is no plumbing the ocean for what we can learn about ourselves and lessons for building solidarity with creatures we can understand almost nothing about. Instead, *Sealed With a Kiss* shows us aquatic life as healthily separate from humans. It shows us a future where we don't suffocate the ocean with pollution and violence, leaving it, whether by choice or extinction, to thrive. For however goofy and campy they are, animated seals literally dance on our watery graves. Mentz's swimmer poetics theorizes how

humans can survive in the face of impending climate change. This necessary hope constructs an alternative future world where we back off the self-destructive path we are headed down. In contrast, scuba diving as a practice calls us to recreate lost worlds that exist entirely outside our scope of embodied and procedural knowledge. There isn't an appropriate critical studies apparatus that is able to hold the alienness and opaqueness of ocean animals, which runs counter to so many arguments about building solidarity and community with the nonhuman. *Sealed with a Kiss* and scuba diving in Shakespeare, while still inescapably tied up anthropocentrism, ask us to grasp our epistemological failures and embrace the queerness of the ocean and its animals.

CHAPTER III

THE OCEANIC GENDER NONCONFORMITY OF *TWELFTH NIGHT*'S CESARIO

Twelfth Night's Cesario slides through genders and ultimately exists beyond a rigid male/female binary as they make their way on the shores of Illyria, prophetically embodying what we contemporarily understand as gender nonconformity. Scholars have historically focused on the nexus of clothing and gender to construct readings of this play and character which pin Viola's transition to the eunuch Cesario as a mere disguise of cross-dressing. If we turn towards contemporary trans criticism and activism, we can begin to process how terms like cross-dressing and disguise enter realms of being harmful and reductive in that they assume Viola has a 'true' gender identity as a woman. Additionally, a focus on removable clothing as a marker of identity elides the bodily and material process of gender. I share similar provocations with Sawyer Kemp's work on widening the scope of who, and what, constitutes trans identity in this period. For Kemp, the practice of finding trans identity through clothing in *Twelfth Night*, Viola/Cesario's "instant and absolute disguise," is a project that "loses the cultural specificity of early modern gender nonconformism" and "the cultural specificity of contemporary trans people and the narratives they have produced" (123, 122). Instead of focusing on clothing and outward presentation, Kemp pushes us towards a more expansive "criterion for identifying and applying trans theory to characterization and identity" that involves asking questions like: "What

characters in Shakespeare might participate in discussions of body dysphoria, a major mental health issue for trans people? What characters experience harassment by law enforcement figures, as do over one-third of trans people?” (124).

At the heart of Kemp’s questions are this chapter’s questions: What don’t we ask about the early modern trans person or experience? Where can we find trans identities in this period that are not based on clothing but on a natural, bodily process? How might we use Shakespeare to speak towards an inclusive worldview where trans bodies are not denigrated and silenced but visible and celebrated? The focus on clothing as a marker of gender identity in *Twelfth Night* is predicated on disregarding the gender transition that happens in Act 1 of the play as the female Viola refashions herself into a eunuch after their shipwreck. I glean from Abdulhamit Arvas’s investigation of eunuchs’ connection to race and trans embodiment which questions “whether or to what degree Viola’s decision to dress herself as a eunuch is a way of embracing gender nonconformity” (130)? Scholars don’t believe that Viola becomes Cesario, that this is merely a woman disguised as a man for the advancement of the play’s plot. We should move away from thinking of *Twelfth Night*’s clothing change and focus instead on the body change that happens in Viola/Cesario. This chapter starts from the premise that we should take Cesario’s gender transition seriously.

Cesario’s transition from Viola is intricately linked with the ocean, showing us that gender nonconformity is a biological, bodily identity. Despite *Twelfth Night* appearing as one of Shakespeare’s more landlocked plays, the shipwreck in Act 1, like *The Comedy of Errors*, incites an instability, in gender and power, in Illyria that only an oceanic catastrophe could deliver. Both the shipwreck and resulting near-drowning in the ocean motivate the play’s central character and

become subtly omnipresent in the minds of each person who encounters the gender-bending, ocean-washed figure of Viola/Cesario. Among the broader range of Mentz's poetic musings about water, shipwrecks receive the most direct link to generative transformations which I intend to connect to with gender nonconformity. In the waves, the ocean's "fluid touch envelopes our skin. Inside this massive body, nothing remains the same" (*Shipwreck Modernity* 181). The cataclysmic experience of being thrown about the surf, for Mentz, is a tool for reimagining the impermeable human body with a posthuman fluidity and instability.

Combining Mentz's understanding of shipwreck with both Kemp and Arvas's push to expand our understanding of trans characterization in the period, I read the oceanic metamorphosis resulting from Viola/Cesario's shipwreck as a transing force.³⁷ I will think through the way that the shipwreck and quasi-drowning in *Twelfth Night* transes Cesario as its disorientation motivates the play's gender fluidity, allowing Cesario to reassemble themselves, disrupting systems of authority in Illyria. While there is the danger of (mis)reading transness into this play, I feel the need to respond to ecocritic Gabriel Egan's logic that, in *Twelfth Night*, "gender is quite irrelevant: persons may stand-in for one another without the structure of human affairs being much perturbed" (7). Gender and gender play are essential to *Twelfth Night*, and the ocean is essential to Cesario's gender transition. Without the shipwreck that nearly drowns Viola/Cesario, we wouldn't, as one scholar so delicately puts it, "be gender fucked again and again" (Holland 387). By examining the subversive instability wrought by the transed body of

³⁷ Stryker, Currah, and Moore write in their landmark introduction to the *Women's Study Quarterly* special issue on trans studies, "'Transing,' in short, ... is a practice that assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being, and that allows for their reassembly" (13).

Cesario, we glimpse the threat and anxiety that oceanic and gender fluidity present to the homeostasis of the land.

This reading moves away from a progressive and generative generation of scholarship which understands gender as a socially constructed phenomenon, swinging the pendulum back to consider how non-normative genders might be considered biological and natural. Cesario shows us that gender nonconformity is more of an essential identity than a response to social constructions of the male and female binary. Their transition is less about the removal of a cisgender status, of peeling back at layers of social ideas about what a female is. It is about Cesario being refashioned and reborn as a gender-nonconforming person. Nicole Seymour, a contemporary queer and trans ecologies scholar whom I have discussed previously in this thesis, offers us a starting point for thinking through Cesario's gender nonconformity and how that identity connects with the ocean as a result of shipwreck. In her seminal book *Strange Natures*, Seymour outlines her concept of "organic transgenderism" which understands "gender transitioning as a phenomenon that is at least partly natural - that is, innate and spontaneous - rather than primarily cultural, or constructed" (36). Texts that highlight gender transitioning as a natural, biological phenomenon are interested in dismantling cisgender systems of knowledge which view the transitioned body as unnatural, a purely social construction. This rendering of biological transgenderism, for Seymour, breaks free from "the rigid social formations that pathologize gender deviance" in a way that shifts "ecological consciousness" towards reckoning with the "existence of a complex wholeness" of all peoples and environments (65, 70). Embracing the naturalness of transgenderism runs parallel to embracing the natural world, the idea that we are all interconnected and interdependent. I believe that Seymour's "organic

transgenderism” allows us to link the spontaneous eunuchry of Cesario with generative versions of contemporary gender nonconformity.

Cesario’s gender nonconformity represents a challenge to the homeostasis and stability of the Illyria that these systems of control try, and ultimately fail, to contain. Cesario’s ocean-infused body slides between categories of gender, class, and embodiment, undermining the explanatory power that is employed to diagnose and dissect it. This chapter follows Stephen Greenblatt’s foundational argument that Cesario is a positive catalyst for refiguring traditional powers of authority which seek to hierarchize and normalize bodies and identities.³⁸ *Twelfth Night* shows us, if we only dare to allow it, that trans blue ecologies connect the matter of the body to the fluidity of the ocean. This is a way of rewriting how bodies are defined and structured towards gender-nonconforming ends. In my exploration of Cesario, from the shipwreck that precedes the play to the subversive marriage at the end, I will use the work of contemporary trans studies scholars, particularly Kemp and Seymour, to illuminate how blue trans ecologies operate in Shakespeare as a fluid process of undoing cisnormativity. Ultimately, reading the ocean into Cesario’s transed body counters claims of the gender-transitioned and gender-nonconforming body as “abnormal” towards a reclamation of trans identity as bodily and biological. Bringing trans ecologies to the early modern period helps us witness trans and gender-nonconforming bodies in nature hundreds of years ago as a way of envisioning futures where “nature” and “natural” don’t only apply to “cisgender, heterosexual bodies” (Straube 229).

Cesario’s Fluidity

³⁸ Nicole Seymour, a pillar in contemporary queer and trans ecologies, also succinctly explains, “[P]henomena as diverse as ecological destruction, workplace inequality, and transphobia are driven by the same hierarchical worldview” (66).

As Viola washes up on the shores of Illyria, with no provocation besides almost becoming a pearl-studded skull on the bottom of the ocean floor, she reasons she needs to transform into a eunuch to make her way in this unknown land:

Conceal me what I am, and be my aid

For such disguise as haply shall become

The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke.

Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him. (1.2.56-59)

On the surface, Viola's choice to assume the mantle of the eunuch Cesario is a practical reaction to her precarious position in Illyria. This gender presentation offers Viola a way to be sexually unavailable in this strange land and a way to find work singing for the Duke after Olivia is explained as unapproachable. What, however, might we gain from moving beyond the pragmatic motivation for Viola to present as a eunuch to the effect that such a presentation has on the character of Cesario and the overall play *Twelfth Night*? Scholar Abdulhamit Arvas gives us a way to see early modern eunuchry as analogous to trans identity. Arvas argues eunuchs were "a distinct gender category in the [early modern] period" and that their "bodies were re-formed, re-figured, and re-inscribed, and ultimately existed beyond the male-female binary" (117). Reading eunuchs as a kind of gender nonconformity in this way speaks to how these figures constantly and naturally broke through rigid binaries that are socially present across time. This liminality of gender beyond the binary, as I will argue further as this chapter continues, frustrates systems of authority that are invested in dissecting and normalizing identity.

As opposed to a gender identity typically forced through violence, eunuchry in *Twelfth Night* is a self-fashioned identity for Cesario, a presentation that ultimately allows our shipwreck

survivor to thrive in the foreign land of Illyria.³⁹ For whatever pragmatic reasons Viola might have to assume the presentation of a eunuch, her choice seems to come out of left field for the audience of *Twelfth Night*. This is, at least in part, because eunuchry is barely mentioned again in the play. As such, the choice to become Cesario after a wash in the ocean feels “innate and spontaneous” when the ‘practical’ reasons for the gender presentation give way to Cesario’s chosen embodiment (Seymour 36). Without the shipwreck that stranded Cesario on the shores of Illyria, there would not be the need to slide into the subversive gender indeterminacy of eunuchry. Without the shipwreck, Viola would not have had the chance to become something new. The ocean unlocks their gender-nonconformism by washing away the predetermined structures that hold them in place on land. The natural process of gender overwhelms and drowns societal norms of binarist embodiment and presentation. While the entire rest of the play is located on solid ground, the salt water floods each scene and action. It is the societal definitions of gender that are ultimately washed away by this version of oceanic gender nonconformity. Although there is always a social aspect and reaction to non-normative gender identity, as we will see in the dueling scenes which I will explore shortly, Cesario presents us with the opportunity to reassert the connection of the natural formations of gender with those that exist outside of the binary.

Shakespeare’s characters often understand the ocean as a place where the sense of self is

³⁹ There is certainly danger in attempting to argue the power of Cesario’s eunuch body is a positive force; for, as Arvas elucidates, “The eunuch today is a contested figure within transgender communities” since, “historically, eunuchs’ ‘gender transitions often involved the coercive violation of their bodies against their will and consent” (129). I believe that there is power in, while not attempting to elide violence, thinking of the possibility of eunuchry as a generative way to map contemporary experiences of nonnormative gender with early modern identities. Indeed, violence is an unfortunate connection in this way.

dismantled and reformed. Traveling on or interacting with aquatic spaces is consistently likened to a process of natural birth and rebirth. *The Comedy of Errors*' Antipholus of Syracuse, for example, remarks after a sea voyage, "In Ephesus I am but two hours old" (2.2.159). Antipholus understands himself as a child in this new land after spending time gestating and being delivered through the ocean. This opens up doors for thinking through the ocean's connection with pregnancy in ways that intimately touch realms of queer and trans theory. Alicia Andrzejewski's stirring writing on transmasculine pregnancy in early modern literature can be mapped onto the ocean as queer, trans, and oceanic pregnancy "can skew our ideas of gender and provide direct challenges to the relationship between pregnancy and femininity." Indeed, oceanic birth and rebirth work to counter Lee Edelman's foundational assertion in *No Futures* that futurity through reproduction is inherently antithetical to the aims of queerness. Viola's rebirth as the gender-nonconforming Cesario by the ocean is the queerest thing about *Twelfth Night*, a play with body mix-ups and male-to-male love. As Cesario's shipwreck and Antipholus's aquatic gestation take place outside of a human womb, the birth process is directly connected with the biology of not just the body but the environments themselves. Oceanic bodies of water birth humans, and we are ultimately bodies of water ourselves.

Oceanic pregnancy directly shows us the naturalness of all pregnancies but is especially important in the context of queer and trans births. Nonnormative pregnancy shifts our understanding of pregnant people and their children towards reckoning with harmful state policing and queer theory's disregard of reproduction as anti-queer. Mentz further touches on this aspect of oceanic pregnancy, in *Twelfth Night* particularly, as he describes how "the twins get reborn in stormy seas" (*At the Bottom* 51). While I agree with Mentz here, I find his ultimate

assessment of Viola/Cesario as a “deceiver” and disguiser to be limited in scope (*At the Bottom* 61). Mentz understands the capability of the ocean and the individual to rework and refashion themselves but stops short of connecting this rebirth to trans potential. Readings and understandings of personhood that assert the material of clothing as a marker of identity divorce the body and gender. We would rather overwrite one’s personal experience of embodiment in favor of easy ways to codify and define bodies based on their external presentation. Instead of thinking of Cesario’s clothing as a disguise, I want us, responding to Kemp’s provocations, to think of Cesario as a transed character made possible by a rebirth in oceanic liquid. There is resistance in seeing Cesario as Cesario and not as a disguised Viola as their organic transgenderism “insists that the perceived unnaturalness of that process is the result of simplistic binary thinking” (Seymour 36). While drowning and shipwreck were a continual threat in the early modern period,⁴⁰ Cesario is led by the ocean to reforge their identity and be transformed by catastrophe. Organic transgenderism “involves the treatment of gender transitioning as a biological phenomenon of the same order as puberty” (Seymour 36). As such, we might link the aquatic rebirth that unlocks Cesario’s gender nonconformity as an instance of biological self-fashioning.

Cesario’s Subversive Indeterminacy

Just as the ocean transforms Cesario, Cesario transforms the court system of Illyria. The court of Olivia is thrown slantwise, as they are forced to contend with the fluid presence of

⁴⁰ Beyond the repeated shipwrecks and near-drownings in Shakespeare’s plays, there are numerous early modern sources that speak towards the threat of succumbing to the ocean. One, for example, recounts the “wonderfull and most fearefull accidents” of an overflowing of water that causing the drowning of “infinite numbers of Cattell of all kinds” (*Lamentable Newes out of Monmouthshire*).

Cesario. In the rest of this chapter, I will develop a reading that sees Cesario's destabilizing presence to systems of authority in Illyria as an extension of both the subversive potential of gender-nonconforming bodies and the early modern anxiety caused by the ocean. Mentz argues that the early modern period was embroiled in a shift of oceanic perception; "The sea's ancient status as alien God-space was rearticulated so that it also became a symbol of freedom" (69). While the ocean in this period was beginning to be understood as a place for commerce and travel, it still was a place of mortal danger and chaos. The ocean brings a certain unpredictability that rattles systems of authority to their core. Take, for instance, Helicanus's reaction to Pericles's voyage; "So puts himself unto the shipman's toil,/ With whom each minute threatens life or death" (*Pericles, Prince of Tyre* 1.3.26-26). The ocean at every moment has the ability to take life or deliver riches. When everything is washed by salt water, nothing is solid. Feste, in one of his jabs at Orsino, says, "I would have men of such constancy put to the sea, that their business might be everything and their intent everywhere, for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing" (*Twelfth Night* 2.4.82-85). Feste understands how the ocean newly allowed early moderns to turn away from home towards distant lands, to find new methods of commerce, and, most importantly, to drift. The near-unlimited possibilities for exploration and self-fashioning that the ocean provided early moderns was, in many ways, a threat to authority figures who were forced to grapple with the instability this liquid world brought to land.

Gender indeterminacy and trans-self fashioning serve as powerful tools for Cesario to make their way in Illyria. Before Cesario is even presented to Olivia's court, Malvolio is already baffled by oceanic transformation when he is forced to make sense of the shipwreck survivor's gender indeterminacy. Malvolio describes Cesario as "[n]ot yet old enough for a man, nor young

enough for a boy - as squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple. 'Tis with him in standing water between boy and man" (1.5.155-158). The steward Malvolio tries to make sense out of the body of Cesario, diagnosing them as a confusion of masculinity, a boy stuck in the typical trajectory of male development. This tracks with Arvas's argument that Shakespeare's eunuchs are often presented as exoticized, confusing figures, that their indeterminate gender makes them "*transformed curiosities*" (128, emphasis original). Though Malvolio's message is that Cesario is a figure of abnormal gender, he uses three nature metaphors to explain that confusion. The squash, apple, ocean, betray a vision of Cesario's biological, earthly identity instead of a conception of gender that is detached from natural processes. For the purposes of the play, Malvolio is, of course, wrong about his diagnosis of Cesario's appearance as a man-boy. However, while the first two metaphors, of the apple and the squash, speak towards an arrested development, the third oceanic metaphor points towards a slippery boyhood and manhood that, unknowingly, offers a generative view into the way Cesario is able to slide between modes of gender and embodiment. Like Malvolio's metaphoric turn of the tide, Cesario's gender ebbs and flows from when they wake up on the shores to the end of the play.

Cesario's provocative gender fluidity, and Malvolio's befuddlement at this transed body, brings into focus *Twelfth Night's* obsession with class hierarchies. Kemp posits that trans characterization is as much about socio-political phenomena, like harassment and homelessness, as it is about gender. Therefore, an argument about oceanic transing is naturally embroiled in an argument about class. Cesario's subversive shifting in gender is parallel with their curious social and economic position. Viola's transition in becoming the eunuch Cesario after the shipwreck is

also a transition that slides this noblewoman “[o]f Messaline” into the role of a quasi-servant in Illyria (5.1.243). Unlike the more outright servants of Shakespeare’s plays, for instance, the Dromios of *The Comedy of Errors*, Cesario operates in an ill-defined class status as part drudge, part gentleman. Maria explains to Olivia that they are “a fair young man, and well attended” at the same time that they are working under the direction of Orsino (1.5.101-102). Throughout the play, Cesario slides between class positions, at once in servitude to authority figures while being the object of these figures’ infatuations. Eunuchs, as trans figures, for Arvas, “were often perceived as ambiguous and accordingly oscillated between various spaces and power positions” (117). This ambiguity serves as a counterforce to Illyria’s rigid construction of class and social status, a hierarchization of its citizens.

Malvolio’s confusion about Cesario’s sudden appearance in Illyria highlighted his line “[t]is with him in standing water” above seems to be as much about class fluidity as it is about gender fluidity (1.5.157-58). Cesario occupies the opaque femininity and attendant status accounted for in the phrase “[n]ot yet old enough for a man” and the gentlemanly grace of “nor young enough for a boy” (1.5.155-56). Malvolio is troubled by this indeterminate class status as an aspiring social climber himself. We watch how quickly he hopes to abandon his fixed position as Olivia’s steward after finding her letter. The steward believes that harassing Cesario as a way of belittling those on his on a social level and marrying above his station will transform his status on Illyria. Dressed in comic yellow stockings, knee-bows, and a distorted smile, poor Malvolio uses comical but stereotypical ways to get ahead. He fails to recognize Cesario’s lesson that class is irrelevant, or at least can slide around, in the face of social and biological self-fashioning.

Illyria’s systems of rule make little room for its citizens to maneuver outside of the determined

social order, which makes Cesario's fluidity all the more subversive.

Like her steward, Olivia is thrown into confusion when she first encounters Cesario, displaying anxiety about having to parse out the transed body before her. In their initial interaction, the two focus intensely on physical appearance. The conversation quickly moves beyond "beauty truly blent" by nature towards Olivia's categorization of her own visage:

I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried and every particle and utensil labeled to my will: as, *item*, two lips indifferent red; *item*, two gray eyes, with lids to them; *item*, one neck, one chin, and so forth. (1.5.243-248)

Cesario brings to Illyria and the court system the defiance not quite fitting, a resistance that Stephen Greenblatt defines as "friction,"⁴¹ which frustrates authority figures like Olivia (85). The countess feels the need to catalog the features of her face, which become not organs or tissue but objects of trade, in a grasp at stability while in the presence of fluid indeterminacy. As the scene continues, Olivia, of course, falls in love with Cesario and dialogues with herself about his class status:

"What is your parentage?"

"Above my fortunes, yet my state is well.

I am a gentleman." I'll be sworn thou art.

Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit

Do give thee fivefold blazon. (1.5.294-298)

⁴¹ See Greenblatt's seminal chapter "Friction and Fiction" in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* in which he explains, "[T]hough gender for the Renaissance has everything to do with determinate boundaries (for the period - as the case of Marin indicates - was intolerant to ambiguity), it has equally to do with the friction between boundaries" (85).

To convince herself that her love is just, and to comfort herself in the face of indeterminate gender, Olivia creates a fantasy where she labels Cesario as a gentleman. She archives Cesario's appearance, their presumed male anatomy, in an attempt to diagnose and understand their body and class position at the same time. Core to Seymour's concept of organic transgenderism is its refusal to accept cisnormative diagnoses of the body, that this version of transgenderism "obviat[es] the medico-technological complex and its commodification of the body" and credits "the characterization of self-knowledge as equal, if not superior, to medical knowledge" (36). Like Malvolio, Olivia is, in the play's vision, wrong about her assumptions about Cesario. Her quasi-medical anatomization fails in its attempt to solidify Cesario's male gender. This inventory distinctly lacks cisnormative masculine features, as the noblewoman focuses on their speech, countenance, and general shape over more specifically gendered traits like Olivia inventories her own femininity with; her lips, neck, and delicate eyes. When we move from thinking of trans and gender nonconformity as responses to primarily social force to a biological process, the natural self-fashioning of gender triumphs over cisnormative definitions of the body.

In failing to assert Cesario's maleness and misrecognition of the natural changes in their body, therefore, Olivia's anatomization constructs an indistinguishably gendered body. Her make-believe conversation where Cesario self-defines as a gentleman and settles the confusion around their body communicates a discomfort with gender nonconformity that cannot be resolved. This scene shows us the ascendancy of trans self-fashioning over normative categories of embodiment. Cesario's gender lies outside of a rigid binary which provides comfort to cisnormative systems of knowledge. Reading this blazon not as a declaration of love but as a collapsing of gender stability for Olivia registers her discomfort in the rest of her short

monologue; “Methinks I feel this youth’s perfections/ With an invisible and subtle stealth/ To creep in at mine eyes” (1.5.302-304). As Cesario slips their way into Illyria, their fluid indeterminacy slips into the minds of courtly authority figures. Olivia’s eyes are the site of tears in the first scene of the play,⁴² but here those tears are replaced with Cesario’s body, which is just as salty and oceanic. Olivia, it seems, is forced to confront Brayton’s lesson that “[e]ven if human lives transpire on land, nothing about them truly stands on solid ground” as traditional categories of gender fail to capture the oceanic Cesario (143). In just one scene, our shipwrecked guest undermines the explanatory power of both Malvolio and Olivia. These authority figures’ anxious attempts to define and categorize Cesario ultimately fail in the face of their gender indeterminacy.

As Cesario’s fluidity presents a destabilizing threat to the homeostasis of Illyria, authority figures in the courts work to diagnose and dissect their body. This desire becomes most clear, and most visceral, as Sir Andrew makes motions to challenge Cesario to a duel. Sir Toby, reading Andrew’s letter of intention to fight, recites, “*Thou com’st to the Lady Olivia and in my/ sight she uses thee kindly. But thou liest in thy throat*” (3.4.164-165). While this accusation of lying might be a familiar Shakespearean insult,⁴³ it has eerily gender essentialist sentiments in *Twelfth Night*. In pointing to the falsity of Cesario’s throat, Sir Andrew calls into question some of the primary ways that people are traditionally (i.e. cisnormatively) distinguished by gender - the pitch of the voice and prominence of the Adam's apple. This gender-based harassment continues into the duel

⁴² Valentine explains Olivia’s habits to Orsino; “[L]ike a cloistress she will veiled walk,/ And water once a day her chamber round/ With eye-offending brine” (1.2.30-32).

⁴³ The accusation is also used in *Richard III* as Anne scolds Richard, “In thy foul throat thou liest” (1.2.99).

itself as Andrew orders Cesario, “Dis-/mount thy tuck” (3.4.332-233). Here again, a familiar motion to draw swords reads as a charge for Cesario to show their genitals. Andrew is unaware of Cesario’s, in the play’s view, “true” identity, so this challenge is meant as an inside joke for *Twelfth Night*’s audience. For this tease to land, gender must be understood as stable. The laugh relies on Cesario’s inability to manifest a penis. However, attuning ourselves to Cesario’s gender nonconformity calls us to see Andrew’s unknowingly cisgendered challenge to Cesario as the anxiety that comes from a gender system that is being picked at. Shakespeare’s real joke, then, is on the audience of *Twelfth Night* themselves as categories of gender are not a stable constant. While gender is not fully dismantled in the play, Cesario’s shifting identity teaches us that gender is more permeable and fluid than we allow it to seem, even in the early modern period.

Cesario’s Hope

To fully commit to this recuperative reading of *Twelfth Night* as a test case for oceanic trans ecologies in the early modern period, we need to grapple with the play’s ending. I wish to find some hope in Cesario’s position at the end of the play. I, again, adopt Greenblatt’s foundational reading of *Twelfth Night* where he asserts that the distinction of male and female is “blurred,” and the “home to which [this distinction] is supposed to be brought may seem less securely ours, less cozy and familiar, than we have come to expect” (72). I see this discomfort as a way to communicate a hope that Cesario’s journey of subversive gender nonconformity is a generative force for modern audiences. While Feste ultimately has the last words, which we will move to in a moment, the duke of Illyria leaves us with a promise of marriage;

A solemn combination shall be made

Of our dear souls....

... Cesario, come,
For so you shall be while you are a man.
But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen. (5.1.406-411)

Upon first glance, it is almost as if Orsino is reproducing some of the harmful practices that Kemp outlines as the pitfalls of scholarship on gender in *Twelfth Night*. Reading the lines above immediately calls to mind Kemp's assertion that "we need to challenge our scholarship to locate transgender identity in something other than clothing" as Orsino seems to equate clothing with gender identity (124). While this moment might give us pause, I would push us to think about how Orsino's final lines commit to a vision of Cesario's gender nonconformity. The speech unfolds as an acceptance of his new love's potential gender fluidity. Orsino will call Cesario by the name they choose and, if Cesario so desires, will love them if they decide to dress in more stereotypically feminine clothes. I pivot from Casey Charles's argument that the play's "necessary upheaval of entrenched gender politics... [while] successful in questioning identity, does not necessarily give these characters what they want" (141). Shakespeare does not force Cesario to transition into the 'correctly gendered' character of Viola for the play to end. Instead, Cesario makes a marriage contract with their duke while still dressed as, and indeed embodying, a masculine figure. *Twelfth Night* ends, then, with the possibility that Cesario is being woven into the fabric of Illyria, an embracing of this oceanic fluidity that has caused anxiety in Olivia's court.

The presence of gender nonconformity prompted by the transformative power of the ocean in *Twelfth Night* highlights how transing can "function as an escape vector, line of flight,

or pathway toward liberation” (Stryker, Currah, Moore 13). The ocean threatens to wash over both the subjects of the court, disrupting equilibrium, and transmuting humans into less static, more fluid versions of themselves. Ironically, the court becomes obsessed with diagnosing and dissecting Cesario in a way that makes the court itself become transformed by their oceanic presence. Like the trans hope that Orsino’s last lines leave the audience with, of a place where Cesario can be Cesario as they wish, Feste’s famous “Hey, ho, the wind and the rain” song leaves the audience of the play knowing that fluidity has indeed come to land (5.1.413). However, it is not just rain that will continually wet the land of Illyria but the increased push towards the disruption that Cesario embodies. Their gender fluidity “threatens the smooth running of a heteronormative society that relies on a robust organization of gender” (Chen 147-148). Working through the shipwreck and washing in salt water that prompts Cesario’s transformation, and the disorganization that the court falls into in reaction to that transformation, pushes us to recognize the power of the ocean and trans identity as subversive forces to oppressive figures of authority and systems of knowledge. Underneath this subversion runs a deep current of natural self-fashioning that Cesario brings to Illyria, where gender becomes more biological and less social. In a refusal to others define their body and fluid experience, Cesario carves a space for themselves where they are able to push in on the rigid notions of gender, social mobility, and embodiment that they face.

CODA

I cannot help but end by remarking that, as I am currently writing this chapter, there is a slew of anti-queer and trans bills violently working their ways through state governments across the U.S. Arkansas voted to pass the Save Adolescents From Experimentation (SAFE) Act, which

effectively blocks transgender people under 18 from receiving gender-affirming medical treatment and services. Chris Strangio, Deputy Director of Transgender Justice for the ACLU, calls this “the single most extreme anti-trans law to ever pass through a state legislature” (Yurcaba). This law, crucially, makes it a felony for a medical professional to provide health care to trans youth, meaning that a minor already on a puberty blocker or hormone would not be able to receive their medicine. As various news outlets have highlighted, this law is detrimental to the physical and mental health of these youth and will lead most likely to, and seemingly already has, a spike in suicide attempts among trans teens.⁴⁴ In addition to Arkansas, Florida passed the detrimental “Don’t Say Gay” bill, which bans teachers from educating their students on sexual orientation and gender. Maddeningly, Texas has criminalized parents providing gender-affirming care to their children under the guise of child abuse. These laws and decisions by state governments are shocking, disruptive, and violent to the entire LGBTQIA2+ community, especially children who need the most love and protection.

Now, I don’t want to pretend that an argument about Shakespeare’s ocean is going to save a young trans or queer kid in the face of their state government telling them they don’t deserve to flourish. However, I do think that bringing trans and queer ecologies to the early modern period might help us in witnessing trans, queer, and gender-nonconforming bodies in nature hundreds of years ago as a way of envisioning futures where “nature” and “natural” don’t have to only apply to “cisgender, heterosexual bodies” (Straube 229). Trans and queer ecologies are about survival. They are about self-fashioning in the face of authority figures and systems of knowledge that are

⁴⁴ “‘Since the bill was approved, four young people in Hutchison’s program have attempted suicide,’ she said. ‘Other patients have called the clinic to ask if they’ll be able to get their medications on the black market if the ban takes effect’” (Demillo and Cray).

poised to diagnose, disrupt, and dismantle non-normative identities. I again bring forth Seymour's concept of organic transgenderism to speak towards what I hope Cesario can offer our current moment. Their insistence on being a part of Illyria, of the place that seeks to normalize their body, shows us a "complex wholeness that we can only see through an empathetic imagination" (70). The transformative power of the ocean shows us a way of connecting the transed and queer body to its environment and demonstrating how systems of authority become obsessed with disciplining these bodies, a historical test case for an all-too contemporary experience. While reading near-drownings in salt water as trans characterization and the queer implications of the ocean runs the danger of falling into the traps of unspecificity that Kemp outlines, I believe it attempts to continue a trans and queer ecological and new materialist conversation that can speak directly to our current moment. Reading the ocean into the transed body of Cesario becomes a larger project of expanding our worldview to include the queer and "transgender person as a valuable part of an all-encompassing web of life" (Seymour 39). Shakespearean trans and queer ecologies teach us, if we allow them to, not just about the intricacies of identities and environments across time, but how to make our way compassionately in a world where we are not always welcome.

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VITA

EDUCATION

BA in English, with Honors January 2016
Lehigh University (Bethlehem, PA)
Honors thesis title: “‘The Ill Counsel of a Desert Place’: Ecologizing the Queerness of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*”
Advisor: Mary Foltz

TEACHING AND ADVISING

Graduate Student Consultant (University of Mississippi) Fall 2021 and Spring 2022
University of Mississippi Writing Center

Co-Instructor of Record (University of Mississippi) Summer 2020
English 223: Survey of English Literature to the Civil War

Teaching Assistant (University of Mississippi)
English 220: Survey in Literary History Spring 2021
English 226: Survey of British Literature since the 18th Century Spring and Fall 2020
English 225: Survey of British Literature to 18th Century Fall 2019

Technology, Research, and Communication Program Writing Fellow 2014-2015

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Small Town Gay Recovery: Queer Sobriety in the U.S. South.” University of Brighton’s Outside/rs Conference (Online - April 2022)

“Oceanic Gender Nonconformity in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.” South Central Renaissance Conference (Online - March 2022)

“Queering the Ocean in Shakespeare’s *Pericles* and *The Comedy of Errors*.” Utah Shakespeare Festival’s Wooden O Symposium (Online - August 2021)

“Coral Kings and Shipwrecked Gentlemen: The (Trans)ecological Dynamics of Shakespeare’s

Ocean.” UCLA Medieval and Early Modern Student Association’s “Resilience, Resistance, and Renewal in the Medieval and Early Modern World” Symposium (Online - May 2021)

“‘Tis with him in standing water’: The *Transformative* Power of Saltwater in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.” University of Sheffield’s “Wet Feet? Flooding, Resilience and the Climate Crisis” Conference (Online - May 2021)

“He’s in the third degree of drink: he’s/ drowned’: *Transmuting* Alcohol in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.” University of Toronto Graduate English Conference: “Intimacies/ Intimations” (Online - April 2021)

“All scattered in the bottom of the sea’: Shakespeare’s Queer Ocean.” Newberry Library’s Annual Multidisciplinary Graduate Conference in Premodern Studies (Online - February 2021)

“Finding New Ways to Live’: Learning from the Queerly Ecological Networks of *S-Town* and *Tiger King*.” South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference (Online - November 2020)

“Excavating Excrement in Contemporary(ish) Ecopoetry.” Association for the Study of Literature and Environment Symposium (Online - July 2020)

RESEARCH AND EDITING EXPERIENCE

UM Writing Center Open Educational Resources Institute	Spring 2021
Project Editor - Bloomsbury <i>Dictionary of Shakespeare and Animals</i> , ed. Karen Raber and Karen Edwards, forthcoming 2022	Summer 2021
Mountaintop Summer Research Project (Lehigh University) “Bethlehem Unbound: Storytelling Beyond the Book”	Summer 2015

GRANTS AND AWARDS

Summer Research Assistantship (University of Mississippi)	Summer 2021
Strohl Undergraduate Summer Research Grant (Lehigh University)	Summer 2015