CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

INTRODUCTION

Observing the population levels of 7,964 native species and cross-referencing the results with a Biodiversity Intactness Index, conservationists have pronounced the United Kingdom to be one of the most "nature-depleted countries in the world."[1] Not coincidentally, it also has the dubious distinction of being among the least forested in Europe: its 13 per cent wood cover (10 per cent in England) barely amounts to a third of the EU average of 38 per cent.[2] Since conservation biology trades in hard statistics gleaned from consistent observation, the 2016 State of Nature Report defines "long term" as the past forty years. But Britain was not de-wilded in a few decades. It has been a centuries-long saga, one of the most eventful chapters of which coincides with the great cultural flowering known as the Renaissance.

Despite the fact forty years is an eyeblink in geological terms, ecocriticism has tended to patrol a narrow strip of the recent past. While this is in part due to an admirable concern for the here and now, it also results from a myopia induced by crude narratives in cultural and environmental history. Surely, before Wordsworth gazed down upon the Wye Valley no one bothered to peer "into the life of things." Prior to Darwin's *Origin of Species*, humans fancied themselves the god-like overlords of creation. Only after the Industrial Revolution and post-war pesticides endangered it did the environment come into focus as a realm in need of protection. While puncturing such blithe assumptions is one of the objectives of this book, it has become abundantly clear that environmental criticism need not – and indeed should not – confine itself to anthems to a green and pleasant land. It bears remembering that the picturesque landscapes around Tintern Abbey and the Lake District that so enraptured Wordsworth were wrought by deforestation from ironworks and charcoal-making, and that much of the worst damage occurred in the sixteenth century.[3] The commitment of second-wave ecocritics to move "beyond nature writing" has given wings to a chronological leap beyond the contemporary and Romantic eras into earlier periods when prevailing attitudes towards the natural world were, by and large, not so eco-friendly but which demand all the more scrutiny by virtue of their difference.

[1] See Eaton's summary. Interestingly, the report argues that climate change's impact is ambiguous, helping some species while threatening others, and instead places most of the blame on intensive agriculture.
[2] Forest Research, "*Forestry Statistics 2017: International Forestry.*" www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2017/international-forestry
[3] On "Tintern Abbey," see Levinson, 29–32, and the timeline in Appendix A.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

At the turn of the millennium, excavating the ecological politics of Renaissance literature might have seemed a laughably anachronistic undertaking. Thanks to the diligent toils of a legion of scholars, whose insights I have sought to graft into this anthology, that is no longer the case.[4] Tudor England reformed more than its religion; it embarked on a vigorous campaign to "improve" its fields, woods, moors, waterways, and fens. Examining these developments would once have been considered the province of the small sub-discipline of agrarian history. Now that the Anthropocene, as Dipesh Chakrabarty powerfully argues, has both dissolved the boundaries between natural history and human history and exposed how modernity's freedoms have been purchased with the spoils of planetary conquest, investigating the roots of our species' emergence as a geological force has become an urgent task for the environmental humanities. Whether or not the scientific community accepts Lewis and Maslin's proposal that the "Orbis spike" of 1610 (coinciding roughly with the establishment of the first permanent English settlement in North America and the premiere of Shakespeare's *Tempest*) heralds the onset of this brave new era, the two centuries after Columbus's voyage indisputably represent a pivotal moment in the history of the earth. Of course tallying up the facts and figures of harvest yields, wool exports, and tree cover can only tell so much of the story; it is vital to probe the underlying beliefs and aesthetics that propelled, resisted, or adapted to these efforts to understand and colonize the natural world. Elizabethan poets, playwrights, and naturalists often bear witness to the changes unfolding around them, and the entries gathered here present something like a biocultural audit of the English Renaissance.

The past decade has produced a bumper crop of monographs and edited collections on Renaissance literature and the environment, yet the field still lacks a teachable compendium of primary texts. Since ecocriticism boasts a commitment to praxis, packaging and relaying research to students and the broader public is every bit as important as publishing an erudite article in a scholarly journal. This anthology is not targeted solely at undergraduates, however. It should also serve as a vade mecum or sourcebook to galvanize further critical research. It advances original interpretations of dozens of texts, and presents the fruits of painstaking archival labour on both sides of the Atlantic, sifting through hundreds of manuscripts: from forestry surveys to psalm translations to Star Chamber cases to poems about the weather to patents for clean coal. Collectively, these materials expose the eco-material muck that underlies literary production in Renaissance England.

Compiling a new anthology is always a cherry-picking, and a new theoretical movement nudges one to trawl through untrodden rows in the orchard, even if – as in Proserpina's Garden – not everything that grows there

[4] A thorough list of scholarship that has informed this anthology can be found in Appendix B, "Further Reading: A Bibliography of Environmental Scholarship on the English Renaissance."

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

is sweet. Just as feminism and post-colonial studies broadcast the voices of those marginalized or silenced due to gender and race, ecocriticism makes a place at (not just on) the table for the other species with whom we share the planet. The disturbing corollaries between the oppression of the Other and the exploitation of nature make ecocriticism a logical extension of, rather than a diversion from, these earlier critical insurgencies. It demands a radical shift in both how we read and what we read. It demands a change in how we teach and what we teach. It demands, in other words, a new anthology.

By unearthing over two hundred nature-themed texts and presenting them in accessible modern spelling, this book offers itself as a friendly field guide for ecocritical studies on Renaissance England. Spanning the disciplines of literature, science, and history, it unveils a radiant panorama of a nation at a crossroads between its pastoral heritage and industrialized future. Its contents comprise a *Wunderkammer* of primary sources on nature and natural history during a time of intense cultural ferment and dramatic environmental change. Readers will be escorted on a bracing tour of the nation's natural splendours and survey some pressing environmental concerns. Instead of a uniformly verdant and pleasant land, England is revealed to be coping with problems all too familiar to twenty-first-century readers: deforestation, pollution, resource scarcity, extinction, overpopulation, and a volatile climate. The selections cover an encyclopaedic range of topics: from astrology to zoology, bear-baiting to bee-keeping, coal-mining to tree-planting, fen-draining to sheep-whispering. Venturing beyond green spaces, the entries take stock of the recent critical turn to the "blue" and "brown" spectra of our terraqueous planet (and add the "white" of the Little Ice Age), sketching a more prismatic picture of the Renaissance.[5] Familiar voices like those of Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Marvell mingle with a chorus of unsung writers whose works are destined to become touchstones for ecocriticism. Its contributors include farmers, philosophers, herbalists, sailors, bishops, heretics, surveyors, shepherds, entomologists, duchesses, Diggers, hunters, vegetarians, and demographers – not to mention Orphic poets and a motley herd of talking rivers, trees, satyrs, and others animals. Here is nature's plenty.

In garnering the contents, an effort has been made to include writings by men and women from across the socio-economic spectrum and throughout the British Isles. This teeming variety should facilitate consideration of the ways in which gender, class, religion, and region factor into how humans relate to their surroundings. Although early modern England, the first industrialized society, remains its cynosure, the collection encompasses ancient creation myths and apocalyptic predictions of the future. It ranges from the sewers of London to the shrinking woodlands of Arden and the Weald, from Bass Rock in Scotland to the bogs of Ireland. It draws particular attention to the mountainous Welsh landscape – the Renaissance equivalent of the Lake

[5] See works by Cohen, Brayton, Mentz, and Eklund.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

District – so admired by Churchyard, Drayton, and Vaughan, and the marginalized tradition of Welsh poetry to invite consideration of whether this culture was more eco-conscious than that of its Anglo-Saxon neighbours (or became so because it was being exploited more aggressively after the 1536 unification). Readers can even stow away on English expeditions to hunt walrus and polar bear in the Arctic and vicariously join in the "fun" of firing heavy artillery at a beached whale in Bermuda. Featuring scores of obscure or understudied works, and repotting familiar texts in new ecological contexts, this anthology reframes the landscape of early modern literary studies and sizeably extends the vista of the environmental humanities.

Needless to say, *Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance* does not pretend to be comprehensive. How could it be? There are simply so many texts that represent the non-human environment that to include them all would swell the book to backbreaking proportions. Nevertheless, the scope and diversity of the contents are hopefully rich enough that they can enable ecocritical readings of virtually any Renaissance text, empowering both novice students and seasoned researchers to probe what Lawrence Buell has called an "environmental unconscious" (2001, 18–22) in writings that do not overtly depict nature. It is not an attempt to delimit a green canon but creatively curate a heterogeneous collection of specimens – many of them tested out in the classroom over the past decade – showcasing some of the multifarious beliefs, literary tactics, and techno-material practices through which people in Tudor and Stuart England understood, represented, and impacted their environment. While this anthology does propose some new ways of conceptualizing the Renaissance, it does not champion a grand unified theory: rather its guiding premise is that a single master narrative seeking to impose unity and intelligibility on the chaotic realities of the ecosphere would be reductive and misleading. Instead of presuming to offer definitive answers and shut down critical debates, this anthology intends to dramatize them and open up pathways for further research.

Two Myths of Environmental History

By selecting texts from a range of authors and literary genres and thus making it difficult to spin pat, one-sided narratives, this anthology aims to steer a *via media* between two myths that plague environmental history, which, for brevity's sake, one might label neo-Ovidian primitivism and neo-Hobbesian barbarism. The first designates the tendency to idealize the past as an immaculate golden age when all humans lived in greater harmony with the environment, the seasons, and other creatures. The second myth is the bleak vision of all pre-moderns as figurative heathens oblivious of the gospel of ecology and hell-bent on dominating and enslaving nature. Evidence for each of these views is not far to seek, and often appears very seductive.

On behalf of Ovidian or soft primitivism, one might observe that the English population in 1600 was much closer to what environmentalists now

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

consider sustainable: Elizabethan London was home to around 200,000 people – roughly the size today of a town like Akron, Ohio or Luton (which the megapolis of Greater London now threatens to engulf) – and much of the area outside the medieval city walls was still green space; in John Donne's day, St Martin-in-the-Fields, in what is now the bustling Trafalgar Square, was still located in actual fields, and Lambeth was still marsh. Moreover, the majority of the population grew or raised much of their own food, living in greater proximity to livestock and wildlife, and Elizabethan texts often assume a familiarity with flora and fauna that few twenty-first-century readers possess. Renaissance writers were also deeply enamoured with the more earth-centred spirituality of ancient Greece and Rome, and a residual animism enlivens much of the poetry of this era. Carolyn Merchant's ecofeminist classic, *The Death of Nature*, asserted that the modern scientific method pioneered in the seventeenth-century by Francis Bacon and his acolytes spelled the doom of this enchanted cosmology and reconstituted the universe as mechanistic and inert. Meanwhile, Gabriel Egan has proposed that the much-maligned "Elizabethan World Picture," with its sense of correspondences across species, could nurture a proto-ecological mentality.

If Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not have a vocabulary of ready-made phrases such as biotic equilibrium or carbon footprint, they possessed other words suggestive of their physical intimacy with the environment. In *Landmarks*, Robert Macfarlane calls for a revival of these obsolete terms – like "smeuse" (a gap in a hedge made by small animals) and "ungive" (an East Anglian coinage for thaw) – on the grounds that they can provide "a vast glossary of Enchantment … that would allow nature to talk back to us and would help us to listen" (32). This anthology includes hundreds of such archaic words, and the glosses are not intended as substitutes but as tools for salvaging and reactivating the ways of seeing they encode. Some of the entries offer snapshots of what are now rare or extinct species, and diminished or even lost ecologies. Consider, for instance, this description of how the English landscape would have appeared to a hypothetical Elizabethan traveller:

> In some parts [one] would see flocks of several thousand sheep grazing over nearly a quarter of a county; in other parts [one] would be confronted by huge stretches of woodland or waste that have all by now been either cut down or reclaimed or else reduced to comparatively insignificant dimensions. [Riding] between Brandon and Peterborough [one] would pass by … an enormous stretch of fen more than 3,000 acres in extent. [One] would find Lancashire three parts morass or "moss," and Cannock Chase in Staffordshire still a mighty oak forest covering, with Needwood, a third of the county. (Byrne 105)

Arguably, only an understanding of environmental history before large-scale industrialization affords the necessary perspective to discern the "slow violence" (Nixon) through which humans have transformed the earth over

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

the past five centuries. In reviving a past less "smeared with trade" and tainted by "man's smudge," this brand of ecohistoricism has a surprising affinity with the contemporary movement known as "re-wilding."[6]

The underside of this apple, however, does not look so savoury. Raymond Williams famously documented an "escalator" effect in which each generation idealizes the previous one as living in greater concord with nature (9–11). In literary history, the glamorization of the Renaissance as the "Golden Age" of English literature can all too readily be compounded with Ovidian myths of an idyllic past. This tendency is already full-blown in Romantic critics such as Schiller and Gervinus, the latter of whom asserted, "in Shakespeare's time, nature had not yet become extinct" (881). Such elegiac historiography tends to yearn for a Merry Olde England and lament "The World We Have Lost." Even when based in fact, wistful visions of the pre-industrial landscape like the one cited in the preceding paragraph can quickly descend into spurious claims that medieval Britain was one pristine greenwood, which a squirrel could cross from the Severn to the Wash without setting its paws on the ground. Insofar as it imagines an almost prelapsarian vision of the past, this "redemptive mode" (Mackenzie) of ecohistoricism must be inspected warily for distortions.

To state the obvious, the people of Tudor England did not fret about greenhouse gases or dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane. They did not conduct sustained inquiries into the population dynamics among species in an ecosystem. What looks like ecological sentiment is often enlightened economic self-interest rather than genuine ethical concern for the rights of non-humans. As Bruce Boehrer cautions, environmental protests in the Jacobean period are entangled within and subservient to "a much broader complex of political, social, and religious grievances" (2013, 167). Revealingly, one of the pioneering studies of Renaissance ecocriticsm traced the ways in which the pastoral's nostalgia for the "green" is rooted in epistemological anxieties over human alienation from the "real" (Watson 2006). To study early modern natural history is to encounter ways of seeing and inhabiting the world that can be alien to a post-Enlightenment and post-Darwinian mentality. If this makes "doing ecocriticism" with writers like Shakespeare more challenging, it also makes it more exhilarating. It also renders the need for a scholarly anthology with an explanatory apparatus all the more pressing.

Rather than a time of harmonious dwelling, the Tudor era can just as easily be pegged as a time of de-wilding. In early modern usage, the word "forest" signifies a royal hunting ground (which may or may not be wooded) and uncultivated land was not glorified as wilderness but decried as "waste." This betrays a profoundly human-centred view of the

[6] The best-known spokesperson for re-wilding in England is George Monbiot. For a representative critique of re-wiliding as perpetuating the nature/culture split, see Jørgenson. Given that Europe has been densely populated for so much longer than North America, it has been suggested that "re-naturing" would be a more realistic ideal (Westphal *et al.*).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

world which environmentalists today, following the lead of William Blake, would classify as a devil's proverb: "Where man is not, nature is barren." If the UK's tree cover now seems worrisomely low, it is probably higher now (by about 2 per cent) than it was during Drayton's lifetime. For many early moderns, the standard of living was too precarious to allow the luxury of concern for non-humans. Agricultural labourers – the vast majority of the populace – would have been too preoccupied keeping the proverbial wolf from the door to squander a thought on the well-being of other species. Indeed, actual wolves had been deliberately exterminated from England in the late Middle Ages as wool became the chief staple of the English economy. Tudor "Vermin Laws" rewarding the wholesale slaughter of species deemed to be pests were, moreover, endorsed by Christian scripture. In a notorious article, Lynn White argued that Genesis 1:26–8 provided European civilization with a biblical warrant to exploit the earth and commandeer its resources. To most people prior to the Industrial Revolution, untamed nature must have seemed a complex of hostile forces that God commanded humanity to subdue. Such views undergird Simon Estok's diagnosis that Shakespeare's era was afflicted with "ecophobia" – a fear and loathing of the otherness and unpredictability of the environment.

Rather than discredit these two narratives, this anthology seeks to moderate them by playing them against each other. If Christianity sanctioned dominion, its natural theology could foster a belief in the sanctity of the creation and all living things, as evident from Pope Francis's 2015 Encyclical, "On Care for our Common Home," which draws on the Renaissance commonplace of the earth as a "magnificent book in which God speaks to us." Crucially, anthropocentric apologists licensed material practices that soon exposed the unsustainability of their own dogma. Hence White's thesis that Christianity was eco-hostile must be qualified by the shrewd observation of historian Keith Thomas:

> It was out of the very contradictions of the old anthropocentric tradition that a new attitude would emerge. That, after all, is how most new ideas appear. Just as modern atheism is probably best understood as a conviction growing out of Christianity, rather than something encroaching upon it from an external source, so consideration of other species has its intellectual roots within the old man-centered doctrine itself. (156–7)

To highlight these contradictions, this anthology juxtaposes works espousing different viewpoints – for and against hunting, enclosure, animal-baiting, fen-draining, etc. – in the conviction that this best encapsulates the era's complexities. While historians who idealize the past should not be acquitted, the sternness of our sentence must be reduced in light of a mitigating factor recognized by Adorno: "So long as progress, deformed by utilitarianism, does violence to the surface of the earth, it will be impossible – in spite of all proof to the contrary – completely to counter the perceptions that what antedates the trend is in its backwardness better and more humane" (84). One of the

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

tasks of this anthology is to dredge up that proof, while also presenting the opposing evidence that enables people – then and now – to discount it.

Renaissance as "Great Rebirth," Late Iron Age, Early Anthropocene, and Little Ice Age

In addition to resisting these two contrapuntal siren-songs, readers of this volume should also be aware of two other besetting temptations. The first is the presentist impulse to view the Tudor and Stuart eras retrospectively through the lens of Romanticism and modern environmentalism. The second is to overemphasize the historical ruptures and downplay the continuities. Again, this anthology does not reject either outright so much as make a bigamous commitment to both. It seeks, as Robert Watson has quipped (in a felicitous marriage of Emily Dickinson and Al Gore), to "tell inconvenient truths but tell them slant" (2015, 28).

This Janus-faced outlook is reflected in the brief introductions that accompany each selection. Depending on the text in question, these have one or more of the following aims: (1) to situate the excerpt in a larger work, author's oeuvre, or literary tradition; (2) to anchor it in early modern natural and environmental history; (3) to direct readers to relevant criticism; and (4) to spotlight issues for discussion or further research. Some of the introductions have the fifth objective of considering how later environmental developments – such as habitat destruction, species loss, and current conservation or restoration efforts – can drastically impact the way we interpret four-hundred-year-old texts. While it traces connections between past and present, this anthology remains dedicated to illuminating – rather than disregarding or greenwashing – the alterity of the Renaissance. This point needs belabouring because the environmental humanities have tended to be unabashedly present-oriented. Tellingly, the first selection in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* comes from Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne*, published in 1789, often hailed as the inaugural year of modernity. Writing about nature, however, goes back at least to Aristotle if not to *Gilgamesh*, and White himself belongs to an eco-exegetical school of parson-naturalists that was already emergent in mid-Tudor times. Moreover, second-wave ecocriticism has expanded its purview beyond nature writing. The environmental humanities stand to benefit from a longue durée approach. Like ice core samples extracted from the heart of a glacier, the entries in this collection decant the environmental conditions (and mental habits) of preceding centuries. In order to understand the current predicament of industrial civilization, it is imperative to chart the road we traversed to get here. It might also be worthwhile to note what got discarded or paved over along the way by the juggernaut of technocratic capitalism, especially if, as some speculative fiction imagines (see Richard Jefferies's *After London* or Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*), we career towards a post-catastrophe future that resembles

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

the pre- or semi-industrial past. Given Amitav Ghosh's complaint that the contemporary realist novel seems inadequate to tackle the moral tragedy of climate change, can Renaissance genres (such as tragedy, comedy, chorography, romance, utopia, or fable) furnish – by virtue of their different foci, shifting time-scales, or greater poetic licence – better alternatives? In studying Renaissance literature from an ecohistoricist angle, something more is at stake than satisfying antiquarian curiosity.

If the label "early modern" underscores continuity with the present, Renaissance might seem to look backward to Greece and Rome. One advantage of this old-fashioned period-concept is that it resists the teleological narrative of progress, while accommodating the idea of multiple, overlapping temporalities. This anthology captures the profound engagement of Tudor England with Greco-Roman antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages. Simultaneously, it invites readers to see how these received ideas were endorsed, qualified, or exploded by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century naturalists, divines, and poets. Did theocentric texts always promote human dominion, or could they foster a vision of the earth as a sacred creation that had been cursed by human malfeasance? How and why did the Renaissance revive elements of Greco-Roman culture that clashed with a human-centred worldview? How did these theories (mutability, metamorphosis, the animal soul, the World Soul, atomism, etc.) and classical tropes (such as personification and prosopopoeia) embolden some Renaissance thinkers and poets to challenge the anthropocentric orthodoxy? This book does not attempt to resurrect Jacob Burckhardt's vision of the Renaissance – itself shaped by nineteenth-century Rhine Romanticism – but to reframe it as a time of heightened appreciation of the beauty and fragility of the natural world. Inevitably, the influx of literature from sunny Italy and the Continent affected England's perceptions of its own temperate climate and natural history. Were these visions of a Mediterranean *locus amoenus* of timeless stability or perpetual spring a stultifying escape from environmental realities? Or could the bounteous Arcadian landscape provoke greater awareness of England as a far less fruitful northern island already suffering resource scarcity?

One of the crucial ways this anthology redefines the Renaissance is not merely as a cultural "rebirth" of the classical past but as an era of *resurgent birth rates* in which population levels culled in the late Middle Ages by bubonic plague catapulted upwards in an arc that continues to this day. Arguably, it was this demographic surge that fuelled more intensive resource extraction, technological innovation, and economic growth, creating more leisure for literary production and consumption. Of course Shakespeare's contemporaries did not see themselves as basking in a glamorous Renaissance; primed by Ovid, they would have been more likely to regard themselves as denizens of a squalid Iron Age, a perception that would have been strengthened by the booming iron industry in the sixteenth century. While one must be wary of technodeterminism, the development of a new contraption like the blast furnace (first

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51015-5 — Literature and Nature in the English Renaissance
Edited by Todd Andrew Borlik
Excerpt
More Information

erected in England in 1490 and proliferating after the Reformation threatened iron imports from the Continent) may be just as momentous, as far as the earth is concerned, as the coronation of a new monarch. Insofar as early industrialization and the "Great Rebirth" ultimately pushed England ahead of any other nation in embracing coal as its chief fuel source, the Renaissance might be regarded as a synonym for "Early Anthropocene."

On the flip side, this portrayal of the Renaissance as a time when Homo sapiens, like a conquistador planting his banner on newfound shores, asserted its dominion over the earth should be set against the acute sense of vulnerability to the climate. Indeed, the drive to reclaim wilderness and boost food production was often motivated by recurrent harvest failures. This anthology presents ample testimony supporting the paleo-climatological evidence of this period as one of global cooling; in fact, one of its working titles was "Literature and Nature in the Little Ice Age." Although this phenomenon or "hyperobject" (to borrow Timothy Morton's term for something so spatially and temporally vast that it befuddles human comprehension) may be more accurately imagined as an "increased variability of the climate" (Mann 504) rather than a steady chill, average temperatures in northern Europe seem to have dipped most notably throughout the seventeenth century, an occurrence that problematizes the tendency of historians to seize on the Civil War or Interregnum as a stopping-point. Since this meteorological epoch is generally considered to stretch from 1300–1850, however, a proper survey of it would need to run to several hefty volumes. Moreover, defining the era solely by the weather might promote climatic determinism. While no single label can do justice to all these co-existing and interrelated developments, one conclusion can be drawn: ecocriticism demands that we rethink the narrow periodization of literary history. As a modest contribution to that effort, this book encourages readers to see the authors as of their time, while also asking what they might have to say to our time.

Anthology as Literary Compost

Since a core tenet of ecology is "everything is connected to everything else," the structural divisions in this anthology might seem at first glance counterproductive. These divisions should not be regarded as airtight compartments but as sieves; images or opinions found in Part I can trickle through many other readings and bubble up again in, say, Part VI. True to Charles Foster's definition of the animal as a "rolling conversation with the land from which it comes and of which it consists" (20), Renaissance texts often recognize that certain species are entwined with specific places (e.g. Drayton's catalogues of birds and fish in the fens; the gannets on Bass Rock), or even with specific times (the swallows of summer). Consequently, readers should resist the temptation to abstract fauna and flora from their ecology. For that reason, one need not move through this book in a linear fashion. Editorial asides often rip open wormholes, inviting readers to leap between sections.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org