

LITERATURE AND NATURE IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

Featuring over two hundred nature-themed texts that span the disciplines of literature, science and history, this sourcebook offers an accessible field guide to the environment of Renaissance England, revealing a nation at a crossroads between its pastoral heritage and industrialized future. Carefully selected primary sources, each modernized and prefaced with an introduction, survey an encyclopaedic array of topographies, species, and topics: from astrology to zoology, bear-baiting to bee-keeping, coal-mining to tree-planting, fen-draining to sheep-whispering. The familiar voices of Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Marvell mingle with a diverse chorus of farmers, herbalists, shepherds, hunters, foresters, philosophers, sailors, sky-watchers, and duchesses – as well as ventriloquized beasts, trees, and rivers. Lavishly illustrated, the anthology is supported by a lucid introduction that outlines and intervenes in key debates in Renaissance ecocriticism, a reflective essay on ecocritical editing, a bibliography of further reading, and a timeline of environmental history and legislation drawing on extensive archival research.

TODD ANDREW BORLIK is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Huddersfield and the author of *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature* (2011).

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RENAISSANCE

An Ecocritical Anthology



Edited by

TODD ANDREW BORLIK
UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD



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CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> xv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvi
<i>Editorial Principles: Towards the Ecocritical Editing of Renaissance Texts</i>	xviii
Introduction	I
PART I <i>Cosmologies</i>	
Creation and the State of Nature	25
“The Creation of the World,” from Genesis (c. 900–500 BCE; the Geneva translation 1560)	27
Ovid, “The Creation,” “The Four Ages,” and “The Oration of Pythagoras” (4 BCE – 2 CE; Arthur Golding translation 1567)	30
Lucretius, “That the World Was Not Created for Mankind’s Sake” and “The First Productions of the Earth” (c. 55 BCE; Lucy Hutchinson translation c. 1650s)	36
Philip Sidney, “As I my little flock on Ister Bank” (c. 1580)	38
William Shakespeare, “Each thing’s a Thief,” from <i>Timon of Athens</i> (c. 1606)	43
John Norden, “The state of this island of Great Britain at the beginning” (1607)	44
Thomas Traherne, “Dumbness” (c. 1660)	46
Lucy Hutchinson, [The Third Day] and [The Naming of the Animals] (c. 1670s)	49
Natural Theologies	52
Psalm 104 (c. 900–400 BCE; Mary Sidney translation c. 1599)	52
Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, “The World’s a Book in Folio” (1578; Joshua Sylvester translation 1605)	55
Giordano Bruno, “The World Soul” (1584)	57
Richard Hooker, “The Law Which Natural Agents Have Given Them to Observe” (1593)	60
John Donne, “Why are we by all Creatures waited on?” (c. 1609)	63

Walter Raleigh, “How It Is To Be Understood That the Spirit of God Moved Upon the Waters” and “That Nature Is No <i>Principium Per Se</i> ” (1614)	63
George Wither, “Song for Rogation Week” (1623)	65
John Milton, “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity” (1629)	66
George Herbert, “Man” and “Providence” (1633)	70
Thomas Browne, “Nature is the Art of God” (c. 1635)	75
Thomasine Pendarves, [Embracing the Creatures] (1649)	77
Joseph Caryl, “To cause it to rain on the earth where no man is” (1653)	79
John Ray, from <i>The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation</i> (1691)	81
PART II <i>The Tangled Chain</i>	
Hierarchy and the Human Animal	87
Ambroise Paré, “Of Monsters by the Confusion of Seed of Diverse Kinds” (1572; Thomas Johnson translation 1634)	87
Reginald Scot, “That the Body of a Man Cannot Be Turned into the Body of a Beast by a Witch” (1584)	89
Michel de Montaigne, “Apology for Raymond Sebond” (c. 1580; John Florio translation c. 1603)	91
Francis Bacon, “Prometheus, or the State of Man” (1609; Arthur Gorges translation 1619)	99
René Descartes, “The Animal Machine” (1637; anonymous translation 1649)	102
Margaret Cavendish, [Animal Intelligence] (1664)	103
John Bulwer, “Man was at first but a kind of Ape” (1650)	105
Ann Conway, “This Transmutation of Things out of one Species into another” (c. 1675)	107
from Anonymous, from <i>Scala Naturæ</i> (1695)	110
Beasts	113
Edward Topsell, [Dedicatory Epistle] and “Of the Unicorn,” from <i>A History of Four-Footed Beasts</i> (1607)	113
Thomas Heyrick, “On an Ape” (1691)	117
William Shakespeare, [The Courser and the Jennet], from <i>Venus and Adonis</i> (1593)	118
John Harington, “My Dog Bungay” (1608)	121
William Baldwin, from <i>Beware the Cat</i> (c. 1553)	123
Kenelm Digby, “Concerning the Invention of Foxes and Other Beasts” and “Of the Several Cryings and Tones of Beasts” (1644)	126
Thomas Tryon, “Of the Language of Sheep” (1684)	129

<i>Contents</i>		vii
Jacques Du Fouilloux, “The Badger” (1561; George Gascoigne translation 1575)		130
Richard Brathwaite, “The Squirrel” and “The Hedgehog” (1634)		132
Edward May, “On a Toad” (1633)		135
John Derricke, “[Why] the Irish ground ... neither breedeth nor fostereth up any venomous beast or worm” (1581)		135
Birds		138
John Skelton, “Speak, Parrot” (c. 1521)		138
Henry Vaughan, “The Eagle” (1655)		140
George Morley, “The Nightingale” (c. 1633)		141
William Turner, [The Kite] (1555) and [The Robin and Redstart] (1544)		143
Henry Chillester, “A Commendation of the Robin Redbreast” (1579)		145
Richard Brathwaite, “The Lapwing” and “The Swallow” (1621)		147
Anonymous, <i>A Battle of Birds</i> (1621)		149
Hester Pulter, “The Lark” (c. 1655)		153
John Caius, “Of the Puffin” (1570)		155
William Harvey and Francis Willoughby, [Gannets at Bass Rock] (1633, 1661)		156
Fish		158
Edmund Spenser, “Huge Sea monsters” (1590)		158
Tomos Prys, “The Porpoise” (c. 1594–1600)		160
Michael Drayton, [Fish in the River Trent] (1622)		162
Izaak Walton, “Observations of the Salmon” and “Observations of the Eel” (1655)		163
Insects		167
Thomas Moffett, from <i>The Theatre of Insects</i> (1589)		167
Charles Butler, from <i>The Feminine Monarchy, or a Treatise Concerning Bees</i> (1609)		169
Richard Lovelace, “The Ant” (c. 1655)		172
Margaret Cavendish, “Of the Spider” (1653)		174
Anonymous, “Upon the biting of Fleas” (c. 1650)		174
Plants		177
Edmund Spenser, [The Oak and the Briar] (1579)		177
William Lawson, [The Size and Age of Trees] (1618)		181
William Strode, “On a Great Hollow Tree” (c. 1634)		183

Robert Herrick, “The Willow Tree,” “The Vine,” “Parliament of Roses to Julia,” and “Divination by a Daffodil” (1648)	186
Anonymous, [The Crab-tree’s Lament] (1558)	188
William Turner, “Orobanche” (1568)	189
John Gerard, from <i>The Herbal</i> (1597)	191
John Donne, [The Mandrake] (1601)	194
John Heywood, “A Rose and a Nettle” (1550)	195
Francis Bacon, “Sympathy and Antipathy of Plants” (c. 1625)	196
Gems, Metals, Elements, Atoms	198
John Maplet, “Sovereign Virtues in Stones” (1567)	198
Anne Bradstreet, “The Four Elements” (1650)	201
Margaret Cavendish, “Motion directs, while Atoms dance” and “A World in an Earring” (1653)	202
PART III <i>Time and Place</i>	
Seasons	207
Henry Howard, “Description of Spring” (c. 1535)	207
Alexander Hume, “Of the Day Estival” (1599)	208
Nicholas Breton, “Harvest” and “October” (1626)	213
Alexander Barclay, “The winter snows, all covered is the ground” (c. 1518)	214
Country Houses	217
George Gascoigne, [The Wild Man of Kenilworth] (1575)	217
Aemelia Lanyer, “The Description of Cookham” (1610)	218
Ben Jonson, “To Penshurst” (c. 1611)	222
Thomas Carew, “To Saxham” (c. 1635)	225
Andrew Marvell, “Upon Appleton House” (c. 1651)	226
Gardens	232
Thomas Hill, “Rare inventions and defences for most seeds” (1577)	232
Anonymous, “The Mole-catcher’s Speech” (1591)	234
William Shakespeare, [The Duke of York’s Garden] from <i>Richard II</i> (c. 1595)	235
Francis Bacon, “Of Gardens” (1625)	237
Andrew Marvell, “The Garden” and “The Mower against Gardens” (c. 1651)	240
Abraham Cowley, “The Garden” (1667)	243

Contents

ix

Pastoral: Pastures, Meadows, Plains, Downs	246
Philip Sidney, from <i>The Arcadia</i> (c. 1585)	246
Richard Barnfield, from <i>The Affectionate Shepherd</i> (1594)	248
Michael Drayton, “A Nice Description of Cotswold” (1612)	250
William Browne, “The Swineherd” (1614)	252
William Strode, “On Westwell Downs” (c. 1640)	253
Robert Herrick, “To Meadows” (1648)	254
John Aubrey, [Salisbury Plains and the Downs] (c. 1656–1685)	255
Georgic: Fields, Farms	258
Virgil, from <i>Georgics</i> (c. 29 BCE; Thomas May translation 1628)	258
Thomas Tusser, “The Praise of Husbandry” (1570)	260
Hugh Plat, “A Philosophical Garden,” “Gillyflowers,” and “Grafting” (1608)	261
Margaret Cavendish, “Earth’s Complaint” (1653)	264
Forests, Woods, Parks	265
William Harrison, “Of Parks and Warrens” (1577)	265
Philip Sidney, “O sweet woods” (c. 1580)	266
Nicholas Breton, “Now lies this walk along a wilderness” (1592)	268
John Manwood, “The Definition of a Forest” (1598)	270
Anthony Bradshaw, “A Friend’s Due Commendation of Duffield Frith” (c. 1588–1608)	273
Michael Drayton, “The Forest of Arden” (1612)	276
Edward Herbert, “Made upon the Groves near Merlow Castle” (1620)	280
Mary Wroth, [Pamphilia’s Tree-Carving] (1621)	281
William Habington, “To Castara, venturing to walk too far in the neighbouring wood” (1633)	284
Katherine Philips, “Upon the graving of her Name upon a Tree in Barn Elms’ Walks” (1669)	284
Heaths, Moors	286
John Norden, “Heathy Ground” (1607)	286
John Speed, [Norfolk Heaths and Yorkshire Dales] (1612)	287
Tristram Risdon, [Dartmoor and the Devonshire Countryside] (c. 1633)	288
Richard James, [Pendle Hill and the Wild Moorlands] (1636)	290
Gerrard Winstanley, “The barren land shall be made fruitful” (1649)	291

Contents xi

Fishing		353
	John Dee, “Manifold disorder used about fry and spawn” (1577)	353
	Thomas Bastard, “There is no fish in brooks” and “De Piscatione” (1598)	354
	John Dennys, from <i>The Secrets of Angling</i> (1613)	355
	Timothy Granger, <i>Seventeen Monstrous Fishes Taken in Suffolk</i> (1568)	358
	Edmund Waller, from “The Battle of the Summer Islands” (1645)	359
Pet-Keeping		363
	John Caius, “Of the delicate, neat, and pretty kind of dogs called the Spaniel Gentle, or the Comforter” (1570)	363
	John Harington, “To His Wife, for striking her Dog” (c. 1600)	364
	Anonymous, “The Old Woman’s Legacy to Her Cat” (1695)	364
	George Gifford, [Witches’ Familiars] (1593)	365
Cooking, Feasting, Fasting, Healing		369
	Thomas Dawson, from <i>The Good Housewife’s Jewel</i> (1587)	369
	Thomas Nashe, “Nature in England is But Plain Dame” (1592)	371
	John Harington, “Against Feasting” and “In Defence of Lent” (c. 1600)	372
	Thomas Middleton, from <i>A Chaste Maid in Cheapside</i> (c. 1613)	374
	Thomas Moffett, “Of Fattening of Meats” (1655)	377
	Thomas Tryon, “The Voice of the Dumb, or the Complaints of the Creatures” (1691)	379
	John Fletcher, “Enter Clorin the Shepherdess, sorting of herbs and telling the natures of them” (1610)	383
	Aletheia Talbot, from <i>Natura Exenterata</i> (1655)	385
	William Cole, “Of the Signatures of Plants” (1656)	390
	Margaret Baker, “Of Millefeuille or Yarrow and His Great Virtue” (c. 1675)	392
	PART V <i>Environmental Problems in Early Modern England</i>	393
Population		395
	Thomas Harriot, “An estimable reckoning how many persons may inhabit the whole world” (c. 1590)	395
	Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, “The Necessity of a Plague” (1603)	396

Thomas Freeman, “London’s Progress” (1614)	397
Walter Raleigh, “Necessary War” (c. 1615)	398
Gabriel Plattes, from <i>A Discovery of Infinite Treasure</i> (1639)	400
William Petty, from <i>An Essay Concerning the Multiplication of Mankind</i> (1682)	401
Enclosure	403
Thomas More, “English Sheep Devourers of Men” (1516; Ralph Robinson translation 1551)	403
Thomas Bastard, “Sheep have eat up our meadows and our downs” and “When the great forests” dwelling was so wide” (1598)	405
John Harington, “Of Sheep Turned Wolves” (c. 1600)	405
John Taylor, from <i>Taylor’s Pastoral</i> (1624)	406
Anonymous, “The Diggers of Warwickshire to all other Diggers” (1607)	408
Gerrard Winstanley <i>et al.</i> , from <i>The True Levellers’ Standard Advanced</i> (1649)	409
Henry King, “Woe to the worldly men” (1657)	411
Deforestation	413
Robin Clidro, “Marchan Wood” (c. 1545–1580)	413
Anonymous, “Glyn Cynon Wood” (c. 1600)	414
William Harrison, “Of Woods” (1577)	416
John Lyly, “The Crime of Erysichthon” (c. 1588)	418
John Harington, “Of the Growth of Trees, to Sir Hugh Portman” (c. 1600)	422
John Norden, “Articles of Inquiry from a Court of Survey” and “Gentlemen Sell Their Woods too Fast” (1607)	422
Michael Drayton, [Deforestation in <i>Poly-Olbion</i>] (1612, 1622)	426
Michael Drayton, “The Tenth Nymphal” (1630)	430
Gerard Boate, “Woods much diminished in Ireland since the first coming in of the English” (1645)	434
Margaret Cavendish, “A Dialogue between an Oak and a Man cutting him down” (1653)	435
Abraham Cowley, [The Oak’s Prophecy] (1662; Aphra Behn translation 1689)	441
John Aubrey, “This whole island was anciently one great forest” (c. 1656–1685)	445
The Draining of the Fens	448
Michael Drayton, “Holland Fen” (1622)	448
Ben Jonson, “The Duke of Drowned Land” (1616)	452
Penny of Wisbech, “The Pout’s Complaint” (c. 1619)	454

<i>Contents</i>	xiii
Anonymous, “The Draining of the Fens” (c. 1620–1660)	457
Gerard Boate, “Draining of the Bogs practised by the English in Ireland” (1645)	458
John Bunyan, “The Slough of Despond” (c. 1660–1678)	460
Samuel Fortrey?, “A True and Natural Description of the Great Level of the Fens” (c. 1660–1680)	462
Pollution	469
Edmund Spenser, [Mammon’s Delve] (1590)	469
Gawin Smith, “For the Cleansing and Clean Keeping and Continuing Sweet of the Ditches about the Walls of London” (c. 1610)	471
Ben Jonson, “On the Famous Voyage” (1616)	473
Patrick Hannay, “Croydon clothed in black” (1622)	477
Hugh Plat, “Sea-coal sweetened and multiplied” (1603)	479
Thomas Middleton, “The Mist of Error” (1613)	481
William Strode, [The Chimney-Sweeper’s Song] (c. 1640)	483
Anonymous, “Upon the Foggy Air, Sea-coal Smoke, Dirt, Filth, and Mire of London,” (c. 1640–1660)	486
William Davenant, “London is smothered with sulph’rous fires” (1656)	487
John Evelyn, from <i>Fumifugium</i> (1661)	488
PART VI <i>Disaster and Resilience in the Little Ice Age</i>	495
Extreme Weather, Disorder, Dearth	497
John Heywood, from <i>The Play of the Weather</i> (1533)	497
Roger Ascham, [The Wind on the Snow] (1545)	500
Thomas Hill, “The End, Effect, and Signification of Comets” (1567)	501
Abraham Fleming, “A Terrible Tempest in Norfolk” (1577)	503
Thomas Nashe, “Backwinter” (c. 1592–1600)	504
Ludwig Lavater and William Barlow, “Dearth” (1596)	510
John Stradling, “The Incredible Flooding of the Severn” and “Another Poem on the Flood” (1607)	515
William Browne, “As Tavy creeps” (1613)	517
Thomas Dekker?, <i>The Great Frost</i> (1608)	518
John Taylor, “The Frozen Age” (1621)	522
William Cartwright, “On the Great Frost, 1634” (1634)	524
Henry Coventry, “On the Dry Summer” (1636)	526
Gabriel Plattes, “Islands of Ice” (1639)	528
John Evelyn, “The Freezing of the Thames” (1684)	529

Decay	531
John Lilliat, “Finding few fruit upon the Oak” (c. 1596)	531
Thomas Bastard, “Our fathers did but use the world before” (1598)	531
Edmund Spenser, “Two Cantos of Mutability” (c. 1598)	532
John Donne, from <i>An Anatomy of the World</i> (1611)	547
Resilience	554
Joachim Du Bellay, “Then I beheld the fair Dodonian tree” (1558; Edmund Spenser translation 1569)	554
George Wither, “ <i>A Posteritati</i> : He that delights to Plant and Set” (c. 1620)	555
George Hakewill, “Of this Pretended Decay” (1627)	556
Michael Drayton, from “Noah’s Flood” (1630)	559
<i>Appendix A Industrialization and Environmental Legislation in the Early Anthropocene: A Timeline</i>	564
<i>Appendix B Further Reading: A Bibliography of Environmental Scholarship on the English Renaissance</i>	581

ILLUSTRATIONS

1	Johann Theodor de Bry, “Mirror of All Nature and the Image of Art,” from Robert Fludd, <i>Utriusque cosmi ... historia</i> (1621). John Hay Library, Brown University.	page 14
2	Bacton Altar Cloth (c. 1590). © Historic Royal Palaces.	15
3	Mandrake, from <i>Hortus Sanitatus</i> (1491). © British Library Board.	18
4	Mandrake, from John Gerard, <i>Herbal</i> (1597). Wellcome Library.	18
5	Nathaniel Bacon, “Landscape” (c. 1610–1627). © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.	19
6	Isaac Oliver, “Edward Herbert” (c. 1610). National Trust. Todd White Art Photography.	281
7	Clement Walker, “The Royal Oak of Britain” (1649). © Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons licence CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.	440
8	Jonas Moore, “Map of the Fens” (c. 1685). © British Library Board.	468
9	The Chimney-Sweep Mulled-Sack (c. 1620). Wellcome Library.	484
10	The Bristol Channel Floods, from <i>Wonderful Overflowings of Waters</i> (1607). © British Library Board.	516
11	Frost Fair, from <i>Wonders on the Deep</i> (1684). © Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons licence CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.	523

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In a feverish effort to compile an exhaustive survey of England's topography and natural history, the Tudor antiquarian John Leland reportedly "fell beside his wits" (Smith xiv). There were moments during the preparation of this anthology when those around me may have wondered if I were destined to suffer the same fate. Fortunately, my mental balance was kept within a half bubble of plumb by the encouragement and advice of dozens of wonderful people. Thanks are due first of all to my former research assistant, Clare Egan, who helped unearth and transcribe several of the manuscripts. An ex-student, Clarissa Coffay, volunteered to assist with this project in its early days, and meticulously prepared extensive selections from Topsell and Gerard. This anthology would not have been possible without the generous support I received from the University of Huddersfield in funding many of my numerous trips to archives. I am particularly grateful to my colleague Jessica Malay, who has acted as both a sounding board and pillar of support.

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xvii

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES: TOWARDS THE ECOCRITICAL EDITING OF RENAISSANCE TEXTS

At the outset, some decisions were made to prepare this anthology in accordance with a few basic guidelines:

- Modernize spelling and punctuation (exceptions noted below).
- Annotate to define archaic words, explain obscure allusions, and record original spellings or textual variants where they may have added significance (particularly if they assist ecocritical interpretation).
- Preserve capitalization when it has rhetorical force, or may imply elevation to a proper noun.
- Preserve original punctuation when it may aid comprehension or enhance rhetorical impact.
- Deploy diacritical marks and syncope in verse to help with scansion.

Each of these choices has significant implications, and thus calls for a brief defence. Modernizing is of course a standard practice with editions intended for classroom use. Thanks to the growing accessibility of Renaissance books in digital format, the need for original spelling is no longer so pressing. Readability seems paramount. Moreover, modernizing should, if only on a subliminal level, help drive home the message that Elizabethan writers, while not exactly our contemporaries, were tussling with and can speak to problems not unfamiliar to twenty-first-century readers. As for punctuation, the plain fact is that in many early modern books it is not authorial but was often left to the whims of the compositors or printers. Sniffing at a modernized text thus seems as obstinate as refusing to attend a production of Shakespeare in modern dress or pronunciation.

Nevertheless, during the painstaking process of editing this anthology I became increasingly aware of the pitfalls of strict modernization. Due to the scope of the contents, implementing a rigid one-size-fits-all policy seemed far too constrictive. The verse of Skelton and the prose of Aubrey call for very different editorial interventions in both degree and kind. As its critics have observed, modernized spelling can blunt or efface the polysemous complexity of certain words. For instance, early modern readers encountering a “forrest” are subtly alerted to its status as a game preserve, a shelter where beasts go “for rest.” When a tract by Winstanley spells

mankind as “Manking” and oppression as “oppresin,” can one be confident that these are mere typos and silently emend them? Similarly, it seems almost collusive to ignore that a royal hunt and bear-baiting took place at “Killingworth” (instead of Kenilworth) Castle. Changing humane to human, fawn to faun, travailling to travelling, arguably diminishes some of the lexical charge these words possessed in early modern usage. When confronted with such cruxes, I have followed Stanley Wells’s advice to adopt the modern spelling for the dominant meaning and to annotate to capture additional resonances lurking in the original.

Capitalization presents a tougher challenge. Most modern-spelling editions today conform to current usage. In an ecocritical edition, however, decapitalizing feels tantamount to decapitation. Beginning a noun with an uppercase letter can endow it with a dignity or honorary subjectivity, which is not necessarily the same thing as anthropomorphism. Texts by the Sidneys, Drayton, Lanyer, Cavendish, and Tryon often – though maddeningly, not always – capitalize the names of animals or topographical features as they seek to transform our sense of nature’s agency and the ethical status of non-humans. Conversely, other writers like Herbert sometimes deploy a capital M to puff Man up above the rest of creation. These nuances matter. Unlike old spellings, they cannot be documented neatly in a footnote. Consider, for instance, this specimen of Renaissance verse: “The World’s a Book in Folio, printed all / With God’s great Works in Letters Capital.” Many Jacobean readers would have agreed with the insinuation by the poet Du Bartas and his English translator that God’s creatures deserve to be capitalized in the same way one capitalizes the title of a literary work. The recent “materialist turn” makes the argument for preserving original capitalization even more compelling since it seems to bestow a greater existential stature on a word. In a note scrawled on the inside cover of a collection of Thomas Traherne’s manuscripts, his Edwardian editor remarks, “in Traherne’s handwriting there is an abundance of capital letters – so much so that this is a distinguishing feature” (Bodleian MS Eng. poet c.42). With a writer like Traherne, this blitz of capitals is more than an idiosyncrasy; it is symptomatic of the poet’s quasi-animistic spirituality. Admittedly, capitals at times do seemingly sprout up at random, but wrestling with these texts forced me to revise my initial policy and let readers decide for themselves which instances are rhetorically significant. While not every single capitalized letter can be assumed to be authorial or to deliver an animating jolt, this edition asks readers to entertain the possibility that the liberal capitalization that prevailed during the Renaissance reflects a pre-mechanistic worldview that was perhaps closer to what contemporary theorists would call object-oriented, and could, before we were modern, amplify the non-human voice in a Parliament of Things.

The prevalence of rhythm and rhyme in Renaissance literature, meanwhile, speaks to the cultural yearning for a cosmos (and polity) pervaded

by order. Consequently, editors should try to avoid interfering with these patterns, especially as deviations can coincide with outbursts of disorder, like the “swervings” that worried theologian Richard Hooker. The need to accommodate rhythm and rhyme also pushed Renaissance writers to employ a Latinate syntax which can shatter the subject-verb-object mould of modern English and thus allow for more flexible conceptions of agency. On related grounds, it seems worthwhile to differentiate (when possible) between an exclamatory “oh” voicing anguish or surprise and the vocative “O” which can address and personify the inhuman. Editors should also follow this commandment: thou shalt not tamper with “thou,” which, as Martin Buber demonstrated, can bind humans and the environment in a more ethical rapport. For the same reason, it would be a distortion to introduce neutral pronouns, and textual apparatus should note variants in pronoun usage in different manuscripts or editions. When Macbeth gloats that none can “bid the tree unfix *his* earthbound root” (4.1.III) or Mary Wroth or George Morley refer to the nightingale as *her*, the pronouns betray the persistent anthropomorphizing and gendering of other species, offering precedents (albeit ambiguous ones) for the challenge to post-Enlightenment usage by some in animal studies and the new field of ecolinguistics.

Could one also argue that there is an ecological undercurrent in pre-modern punctuation? While modern usage prefers to slice and segment thought into tidy, discrete units, the loose-jointed, rambling syntax of the Renaissance seems to emphasize the ecological principle of connectivity: a fluidity of clauses encoding a fluidity of relations between subjects, objects, actions, consequences, and other subjects. Many seventeenth-century writers such as Mary Wroth and John Evelyn composed long sentences like meandering paths through a wood, or like Rube Goldberg devices, where causes trigger effects that in turn trigger other causes and so on. Even when the punctuation is not authorial, it still reflects reading habits of a culture accustomed to tease out complex relationships across grammatical and ontological divides. Since enhancing the perception of connectivity is a cardinal duty of ecocritics there is some justification for retaining this rhetorical punctuation. Thus this edition, while weeding out many commas that retard the reading, preserves some long sentences when occasion demands, deploying the semicolon as a super comma for a brief pause and the colon for a longer pause or amplification.

By following a policy of selective modernization, this anthology could be accused of being “neither fish nor flesh,” a complaint gracefully deflected by the editors of the Digital Renaissance Editions. Such a dish may not be to the taste of purists, but ecology is a discipline that pays little devotion to purity. It seems far more important to make texts accessible for modern readers while also enabling them to glimpse the vitalistic, pre-Enlightenment sensibility interwoven into the stylistic warp and woof

Editorial Principles

xxi

of Renaissance texts. Instead of choosing to be either stringently historicist or stridently presentist, an ecocritical edition has a divided duty. If this anthology encourages more students and scholars to cross-pollinate the study of Renaissance literature and the environmental humanities, its chief ambition will have been fulfilled.

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