



A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflowings of Waters, now lately in Summerſet-ſhire, Norfolk, and other places of England: deſtroying many thouſands of men, women, and children, ouerthrowing and bearing downe whole townes and villages, and drowning infinite numbers of ſheepe and other Cattle.



Printed at London by W. I. for Edward White and are to be ſold at the ſigne of the Gunne at the North doore of Pauls

The Scale of Catastrophe

Ecology and Transition, Medieval to Early Modern

Medieval and early modern texts imagined the world as intercatastrophic: precariously flourishing between a Flood that only Noah and his family had survived and a fiery apocalypse to come, twin purgings of the mortal world. Although the Deluge was in the distant past, divinely promised never again to arrive, medieval and early modern writers share a vocabulary for transition in which both fire and flood are invoked to mark historical breaks and anxious moments of transition. This seminar will pair medieval texts fascinated by survival in the face of cataclysm with early modern texts that carry the stories they offer into new realms. Participants will investigate how the scale of catastrophe is narrated, where *scale* is size (local, global, cosmic) and structure, a ladder [*scala*] that sorts nature into hierarchy. We will consider the gender of catastrophe, mapping whether women tell different stories against and within catastrophe from men, and contemplate the frequent linking of disaster narratives to stories of race, origin, and colonization. The schedule of readings frequently pairs medieval texts with early modern ones that reinterpret them. Participants are expected to bring their own research to discussion and assist in the creation of a course archive. The seminar meets Thursdays 1-4:30 p.m., 29 January through 23 April 2015, excluding 12 March, 2 April, and 9 April. Participants are asked to attend the GW MEMSI symposium "Transition, Scale and Catastrophe" on Friday March 20 in lieu of the Thursday March 19 seminar meeting.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Books in green should be purchased. Hyperlinked items should be downloaded. Items in black are from the Folger archive or available in the seminar Dropbox.

January 29

Promise/Threat

Genesis chapters 1-25 in the Douay-Rheims or King James translation (both if you have the time; the Latin Vulgate as well if you have the skill)

<http://www.latinvulgate.com/>

Holinshed's Chronicles: Britain and the Flood ("Of Noah & his three sonnes"):

http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0127

Laurie Shannon, *Accommodated Animal* chapter 1 ("The Law's First Subjects")

February 5

Fire/Water

Beowulf (in Old English if you can; otherwise read Seamus Heaney's postcolonial Irish translation, including his foreword; Norton critical edition is best)

"The Londoners Lamentation" (on the Great Fire)

<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/31925/xml>

Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (concentrate on "Apocalypse")

Anne F. Harris and Karen Eileen Overbey on Lush Ethics ("Field Change / Discipline Change") <http://punctumbooks.com/titles/burn-after-reading/>

February 12

Between Deluge and Deluge

Chester play of *Noah's Flood*

Chaucer, "Miller's Tale"

"True report of certaine wonderfull overflowings of waters, now lately in Summersetshire, Norfolk, and other places of England" (disaster pamphlet from the Folger archives [STC 22915], also on EEBO)

Albrecht Dürer, "Dream Vision" [of deluge]. May be accessed here (click on the image for a higher res version of painting with German text):

http://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/durer/2/16/2/12dream.html

Lisa Kiser, "The Animals in Chester's *Noah's Flood*"

<http://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/eth/article/view/15238>

Karl Steel, "Woofing and Weeping with Animals in the Last Days" *postmedieval* 1 (2010):187-93

February 19

Foundation Apocalypse

Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Michael Faletra (Broadview), plus Latin version if you can (Boydell Press 2007)

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard 2011)

Suggested: Sharon O'Dair, "Slow Shakespeare: An Eco-Critique of 'Method'"

February 26

Sustain Collapse

William Camden, *Britannia* (“Author to Reader” “Britaine” “The Name of Britaine” “The Downe-Falle or Destruction of Britain” “The English Saxons” “The Danes” “The Normans” “The British Ocean”):

<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/cambrit/contents.html>

William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*

From the “ecological PMLA” [PMLA 127.3 (2012)]:

- Eleanor Johnson, “The Poetics of Waste: Medieval English Ecocriticism,”
- Tobias Menely, “‘The Present Obfuscation’: Cowper’s *Task* and the Time of Climate Change”
- “Sustainability” cluster short essays by Stacy Alaimo, Dan Brayton, Stephanie LeMenager and Stephanie Foote, Steve Mentz

March 5

Rough Seas / Bookwreck

William Shakespeare, *King Lear*

Lear story and its aftermath in Holinshed

- http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0134
- http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_0135

Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* chapter 8 (environmental history without catastrophe)

Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean*

Friday March 20

Symposium on “Transition, Scale and Catastrophe” @ GW

March 26

Material Worlds / Elseheres

John Mandeville, *Travels*, Defective Version

(<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/kohanski-and-benson-the-book-of-john-mandeville>) plus the translation of Anthony Bale (Oxford UP)

Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, “Stories Come to Matter” (*Material Ecocriticism*, Indiana UP 2014)

Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (Indiana UP 2010)



April 16

To Weather

Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful Year* (<http://pages.uoregon.edu/rbear/yeare.html>)

Walter Raleigh, *Discovery of Guyana*, ed. Benjamin Schmidt (Bedford 2007)

Lowell Duckert, "When It Rains" (*Material Ecocriticism*) and "Walter Raleigh's Liquid Narrative" (*Literary and Visual Raleigh*, ed. Christopher Armitage)

Tim Ingold, *Being Alive*: "Earth and Sky," "The Shape of the Earth," "Earth, Sky, Wind and Weather," "Landscape or Weather-World?"

April 23

Retrospect. Prospect.

Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*

Typical seminar structure:

- 1-3 lively discussion of assigned readings
- 3-3.30 tea break
- 3.30-4.30 participant presentations (see schedule)

This syllabus is a work in progress rather than an inscription upon stone. The course is open to collapse, emergence, reconfiguring, and intercatastrophic inhabitation.

