

Lecture 10: Intro to Literature & the Environment, *Donne, Lanyer, Jonson, and Shakespeare*

John Donne

"The world is but a carcass; thou art fed
By it, but as a worm, that carcass bred;
And why shouldst thou, poor worm, consider more,
When this world will grow better than before,
Than those thy fellow-worms do think upon
That carcass's last resurrection?
Forget this world, and scarce think of it so,
As of old clothes, cast off a year ago."
"The Second Anniversary", 1611

Aemilia Lanyer "Description of Cookeham" (1611)

Lanyer was Shakespeare's contemporary; perhaps his "dark lady." Her writing reveals a very different person than Shakespeare's sonnets, as she is hardly a scripted seductress. Lanyer was a proto-feminist.

Lanyer was mistress of Henry Carey, Queen Elizabeth's cousin. Lanyer was England's first professional woman writer; via patronage.

"Cookeham" was written for Lanyer's patron, Margaret Clifford. "Cookeham" describes a community of women (a homosocial group).

The "Description of Cookeham" is a so-called "country-house" poem. Either "Cookeham" or "To Penshurst" was the 1st country-estate poem. (The country-estate genre died off with Upon Appleton House.)

"Cookeham" is part of the explosion of interest in pastoral in London. Country-estate poems are mostly literal (rather than allegorical) pastoral.

"Cookeham" echoes Virgil's Eclogue I, as the exiled speaker develops, and attempts to communicate, an environmental consciousness.

"Cookeham" is new in that women are the disenfranchised, exiled group. (The Cookeham estate was leased from the Crown by Clifford's brother.)

Lanyer both uses the exile motif to dramatize a sense of loss, as well as to catch the moment when the landscape moves forward, as it withdraws: "Placing [its] pleasures in your heart" (l. 154), Cookeham withdraws.

"Cookeham" is both anthropomorphic and anthropocentric:

"Hills, vales, and woods, as if on bended knee
They had appeared, your honor to salute" (l. 68-69)

Anthropocentrism is often opposed to ecocentrism, though it need not be.

Cookeham is actually described as dying without human tending (l. 146).

Hence, Lanyer's environmentalism is a form of (Christian) stewardship.

Ben Jonson "To Penhurst" (published 1616)

Shakespeare competed with Jonson (and Marlow) as a playwright.

In addition to plays, Jonson is most famous for court masques.

"To Penhurst" is in the pastoral mode and of the "country-house" genre.

As in "Cookeham," the house is largely absent from "To Penhurst."

Consequently, focus shifts from house to surroundings (environment).

"To Penhurst" is highly critical of early modern "prodigy" houses:

"Thou art not, Penhurst, build to envious show
Of touch or marble, nor canst boast a row
Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold;
Thou hast no lantern whereof tales are told," (l. 1-4)

Prodigy houses could not be sustained by their surrounding resources.

Hence, Penhurst "joy'st in better marks . . . of air, / Of wood, of water."

In fact, Penhurst would have been surrounded by an explosion of life.

Penhurst responds to Italian inspired architecture, i.e. Hampton Court
(Note the carefully cultivated landscape.)

(Again note the carefully quaffed landscape, and older wing.)

The Penhurst house, as Jonson rightly noted, is lost in the environment.

"Walden" also attacks "prodigy" houses on environmental grounds:

Consequently, "To Penhurst" in some sense anticipates Walden; however, the house at Penhurst is far more opulent than Thoreau's simple cabin. In short, Jonson hyperbolically portrays Penhurst as environmentally benign, while

Thoreau's cabin actually has minimal impact on the environment. One is an ideal; the other real.

This becomes obvious if we look at the two houses together...

"To Penhurst"

Both Jonson and Thoreau would be critical of Nickelback's song "Rockstar":

"I want...a bathroom I can play baseball in."

As is clear from "To Penhurst," excessive (often capitalist) consumption was not only already an ideal in early modern England, writers like Jonson were critical of it-- notably on environmental grounds, as the planet itself was being consumed.

Again, this is not to say that Jonson was proposing particularly radical lifestyle changes (as did Thoreau) in response to the excessive consumption of the planet's resources in his era, but the underlying thinking that gave birth to Thoreau's Walden experiment nonetheless had an early modern emergence.

We know that Thoreau read "To Penhurst" and other country estate poems.

"To Penhurst" explores modern environmental consciousness:

While Virgil explored the emergence of environmental consciousness (by way of Meliboeus' exile) in Eclogue I, in "To Penhurst" Jonson considers how such a consciousness emerges in response to the environment becoming endangered. This is a major difference.

"To Penhurst" gestures to both endangered and pristine environments:

Like traditional pastoral, "To Penhurst" would have us look to endangered and pristine environments. However, in its opening ("Thou art not, Penhurst...") Jonson's poem immediately directs us to the endangered landscape. Hence, "To Penhurst" is in some sense an example of anti-pastoral--not unlike Edward Burtynsky's photographs.

Penhurst, according to Jonson, gestures to its surrounding environment, like Frank Lloyd Wright's house at Fallingwater, PA.

Hence, the house itself, and not just the poet and poem describing it, makes a pastoral gesture.

Penhurst makes a similar gesture to its pristine (at least as Jonson imagines them) surroundings.

Shakespeare's "As You Like It" (1599 or 1600)

The Forest of Arden from Shakespeare's "As You Like It" was a real forest in Warwickshire England, which would likely have captured the imagination of his largely urban audience as something of a modern-day locus amoenus.

Well aware of the fact that his urban audience would likely have perceived the rural countryside as a locus amoenus, Shakespeare sets out in *As You Like It* to reveal that our perceptions of the environment are not only influenced by works of art like pastoral literature, but that these perceptions differ widely.

"As You Like It" was one of Shakespeare's most mature attempts at pastoral: "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" (from the early 1590s), which was Shakespeare's first pastoral play, presents a simplified and idealized view of "pastoral" and life in the country, similar to much pastoral literature of the time.

In contrast, "As You Like It" presents pastoral life from a variety of perspectives: Starting in Act II of the play, as members of Duke Senior's court—including the Duke himself—talk (or sing) about the Forest of Arden surrounding them, it becomes clear that they are all seeing the forest in very different ways...

Views of Pastoral in "As You Like It"

"Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we but the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say
'This is no flattery: these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am.'
Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life exempt from public haunt
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in every thing.
I would not change it.
Happy is your grace,
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style."
Duke Senior, Act II.i.1-20

"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see No enemy
But winter and rough weather."
Duke Senior, Act II.v.1-8

'Poor deer,' quoth he, 'thou makest a testament
As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
To that which had too much:' then, being there alone, Left and abandon'd of his
velvet friends,
"Tis right:' quoth he; 'thus misery doth part
The flux of company:' anon a careless herd,
Full of the pasture, jumps along by him
And never stays to greet him; 'Ay' quoth Jaques,
Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens;
'Tis just the fashion: wherefore do you look
Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?
'Thus most invectively he pierceth through
The body of the country, city, court,
Yea, and of this our life, swearing that we
Are mere usurpers, tyrants and what's worse,
To fright the animals and to kill them up
In their assign'd and native dwelling-place.
Jaques, II.i.45-68

Ay, now am I in Arden; the more fool I;
When I was at home, I was in a better place:
But travellers must be content
Touchstone II.iv.14-16

Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life, But in respect that it is a
shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well;
But in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life.
Now, in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; But in respect it is not in the
court, it is tedious.
As is it a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; But as there is no more
plenty in it,
It goes much against my stomach.
Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?

Touchstone III.ii.13-20

Why, how now, Adam! no greater heart in thee?
Live a little; comfort a little; cheer thyself a little.
If this uncouth forest yield any thing savage,
I will either be food for it or bring it for food to thee.
Orlando, II.vi.6

Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you:
I thought that all things had been savage here;
And therefore put I on the countenance
Of stern commandment. But whate'er you are
That in this desert inaccessible,
Under the shade of melancholy boughs,

Let gentleness my strong enforcement be:
In the which hope I blush, and hide my sword.
Orlando, V.vii.87-118

Fair sir, I pity her
And wish, for her sake more than for mine own,
My fortunes were more able to relieve her;
But I am shepherd to another man
And do not shear the fleeces that I graze:
My master is of churlish disposition
And little recks to find the way to heaven
By doing deeds of hospitality:
Besides, his cote, his flocks and bounds of feed
Are now on sale, and at our sheepcote now,
By reason of his absence, there is nothing
That you will feed on; but what is, come see.
And in my voice most welcome shall you be.
Corin, II.iv.71-83

"As You Like It" makes us aware that we all see the environment differently:
In "As You Like It", Shakespeare explores a range of different perspectives (subject positions) on the environment, from overly idealizing it, to seeing the harsh realities of life in the county for the working class.

