

5-14-2010

Earthbound Humors: An Ecocritical Approach to Melancholy in As You Like It and Hamlet

Angela Brown
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Brown, Angela, "Earthbound Humors: An Ecocritical Approach to Melancholy in As You Like It and Hamlet" (2010). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 1169.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/1169>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

Earthbound Humors:
An Ecocritical Approach to Melancholy in *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English

by

Angela Elizabeth Brown

B.A. University of West Alabama

May, 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| List of Figures | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1: Spleen in the Green World: Jaques, Melancholy, and Nature in <i>As You Like It</i> | 8 |
| Chapter 2: “All moods, forms, shapes of grief.” An Ecocritical Perspective on <i>Hamlet’s</i> Melancholy | 27 |
| Conclusion..... | 51 |
| Works Cited..... | 56 |
| Vita | 59 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| The Optic Glasse..... | 7 |
|-----------------------|---|

ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism explores the way in which artists interact with, interpret and represent the natural world. The concept of “nature,” according to ecocriticism, goes beyond simply flora and fauna, extending to human nature as well. In Shakespeare’s England, a person’s nature was determined by his bodily humors, so the melancholy humor particularly lends itself to an ecocritical approach because it is inextricably linked to the natural world. Transcending genre, melancholy is not limited to the green world of comedy but rather appears in tragedy as well. In As You Like It, the melancholy Jaques offers a foil for the forest teeming with sanguine lovers. In Hamlet, however, melancholy becomes a much more bleak and ambiguous quality, raising questions concerning the nature of acting and suicide. In the study of melancholy within As You Like It and Hamlet, an ecocritical perspective offers a unique insight into the way Shakespeare experiences and interacts with the natural world.

Key words: melancholy, madness, humors, ecocriticism, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, Jaques, Hamlet

INTRODUCTION

It seems, in the current era of eco-awareness, a multitude of activists are attempting to raise awareness: about the plight of the whales, the rainforest, the three-toed sloth, and any other organism, flora or fauna, in the natural world that needs saving. Tree-huggers from the budding environmentalist movement of the 1970s to the Prius-drivers protesting our dependence on fossil fuels feel close to the natural world and feel that humans need to do their part to save it. A feeling of connection with the natural world is not, however, something invented by Al Gore in the early twenty-first century. In my study of *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*, I will draw attention to Shakespeare's connection to nature—but I will not be the first. I am, in fact, in excellent company. Ben Jonson wrote a poem for the front matter of the First Folio in 1623 entitled, "To the memory of my beloved Master William Shakespeare" wherein he asserts that Shakespeare is part "of Nature's family. / Yet I must not give Nature all; thy art, / My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part" (53-56). Further, John Milton, in 1632, wrote of "sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child, / Warbl[ing] his native woodnotes-wild" (133-34). Jonson and Milton's descriptions do not necessarily imply that Shakespeare sat around under trees writing poetry, even though the playwright does draw on a vast array of natural images within his work, but rather that he was close to nature because writing about the human experience seemed "natural" to him. Both Shakespeare's concern for human nature as well as his fascination with the natural world are hallmarks of ecocritical inquiry. It is significant to note that although critics and poets have been associating Shakespeare with nature since the seventeenth century, until recently "very few ecocritics would think to address early modern nature as a subject on its own terms" (Raber and Hallock 2). Gabriel Egan wrote *Green Shakespeare* in 2006, and Karen Raber and Thomas

Hallock, in 2008, edited a collection of essays entirely centered on early modern ecostudies. Adding my voice to this recent ecocritical outpouring in the field of early modern studies, my discussion of melancholy in the characters of Jaques, from *As You Like It*, and Hamlet, then, offers not only insights into man's relationship with the natural world but man's own human nature.

Ecocriticism, a relatively new form of criticism, finds its origins in the 1970s, and many critics are still struggling to determine the definition of ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfelty, in her introduction to a collection of landmark essays in the field of ecocriticism, argues for the interconnectedness inherent in ecological literary criticism and embraces the standard definition of ecocriticism put forth by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic introduce their collection of essays spanning the first decade of the journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, by relating the history of the ecocritical movement from its first mention by name in William Rueckert's 1978 "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" to present-day scholarship. Branch and Slovic, in their introduction, argue that any work can be read and analyzed from an ecocritical perspective (xix). Works of the early modern period invite an ecological critique as Raber and Hallock argue in the front matter of a collection of essays on early modern ecocriticism, wherein they attempt to map out the current state and future of ecocriticism, and, while using the standard definition of ecocriticism, seek to challenge and expand this rubric with its application to early modern texts. In the introduction to Egan's collection of essays wherein he explores a number of Shakespeare's plays from a green perspective, Egan draws a distinction between ecopolitics and ecocriticism: "Political action is where we save the earth, and analysis

of poetry can be where we wield ecopolitical insights to reexamine past representations of analogous situations, and indeed to see how past understanding of the world gave rise to the conditions of the present” (50). On the contrary, Simon C. Estok, in an article outlining what he believes are the basic tenets and methods used by true ecocritics, expresses his belief that theory must take an activist approach to literature and so his definition of ecocriticism is concerned greatly with political activism.

Though ecocriticism was founded by literary critics who were concerned with the abuses of the environment (Glotfelty xvi), I do not entirely agree with Estok’s claim that all ecocriticism, in order to be considered as such, needs to embrace overt political activism and his further dismissal of any ecocriticism that does not have a highly ecopolitical bent. Although ecocriticism is inherently political, since it arose from the ecopolitical movement of the 1970s, the literary theory, at its very root is the study of the “relationship between literature and the physical environment,” and so, the act of looking at texts from a green perspective, if not being overtly political, at least raises awareness about issues of the environment as they relate to the analyzed texts. In fact, in the present eco-conscious climate, “green” is a loaded term that inspires a call to action in some and eye-rolling malevolence in others. With climate change, overpopulation and reliance on fossil fuels gaining attention in the media, and thus among the general population, any look at the “green” aspects of an author’s work is inherently if not overtly political. Egan’s assertion in *Green Shakespeare* that “Political action is where we save the earth, and analysis of poetry can be where we wield ecopolitical insights” (50) suggests that while ideas of politics and literary theory are often interconnected, ecocriticism can exist without an overt ecopolitical agenda.

Whether inherently or overtly politicized, ecocriticism offers valuable insights into the study of early modern melancholy. Glotfelty reminds us, “All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture” (xix). Ecocriticism is thus concerned with the reciprocity between humans and the natural world. Even though Raber and Hollock contend that “languages of earlier periods [don’t] always translate well. The explanations of natural phenomena offered by humoral theory ... seem antiquated, even quaint after Darwin and the advent of molecular science” (2), it is just this earlier language of humoral theory that connects ecocriticism to the melancholy humor. Humors, in Elizabethan England, were thought to be physical aspects of the body that controlled a person’s emotional, physical and spiritual health. Gail Kern Paster notes, in her study of the Elizabethan humoral theory, that “human passions...occur fully within the natural order and take on an elemental force and character contingent upon a fully realized...set of correspondences between inner and outer worlds, between the human body and the world in which it feels and acts in continuous dynamic reciprocity” (56). Ecocriticism’s concern with the interconnectedness of the human and non-human world is presaged in the humoral theory of interconnectivity. Since humors comprise our natural bodies, and “humoral change is itself brought about by the continual and reciprocal interaction of body, mind, culture and the environment” (Paster 50), then there appears an inextricable link between the human psyche and the natural world.

The melancholy humor, particularly, and its connection to the natural world seems to have intrigued Shakespeare. Carol Thomas Neely reminds us that “[i]t has long been recognized that England in the period from 1580 to 1640 was fascinated with madness” (316). Shakespeare,

a man of his times, incorporated the themes of melancholy and madness into a number of his works. In fact, forms of the words “melancholy” and “madness” appear 146 times in Shakespeare’s works (Spevack). Martin Spevack, in his *Concordance to Shakespeare*, notes that melancholy appears 75 times throughout Shakespeare’s work, while madness is mentioned 71 times. Melancholy is cited nine times in *As You Like It* and two times in *Hamlet*, and madness is used 22 times in *Hamlet* and three times in *As You Like It*. From this distribution, it follows that *Hamlet* is more concerned with madness, while *As You Like It* contains more melancholic themes. But are melancholy and madness the same thing? Although melancholy and madness are not synonyms, they do share a close connection. Robert Burton, in his exhaustive work concerning *The Anatomy of Melancholy* published in 1621, maintains that “folly, melancholy, madness are but one disease” (39) and “that they differ only in quantity alone, the one being a degree to the other, and both proceeding from one cause” (140). The cause, which Burton examines at great length, is an imbalance in the humors. Burton also notes that “Galen himself writes promiscuously of them both by reason of their affinity” (140). Though Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* was published 20 years after the debut of *Hamlet*, the ideas that he discusses were widespread during Shakespeare’s lifetime.

Although, Lawrence Babb maintains that “[a]ll of the melancholic traits appearing in [Shakespeare’s work], it should be noted, were traditional and commonplace. It is not necessary to assume that Shakespeare had read a book about melancholy” (*Elizabethan Malady* 107), it is worth noting that there were a wide variety of contemporary works on the subject of melancholy during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, including Timothy Bright’s expansive *Treatise of Melancholie* and Burton’s tome, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. According to Paster, “Shakespeare found in the language of the humors and their four qualities of cold, hot, moist,

and dry a discourse for signaling the relationship within his characters between embodied emotions and perceptible behaviors, between the mind's inclination and the body's temperature" (85). The language that Shakespeare uses concerning humors to describe melancholy and madness is couched in terms of humors, which would invoke, in the minds of an Elizabethan audience the physiological symptoms associated with the melancholic humor.

Beyond simply temperature, though, the Elizabethans believed that each humor was associated with a vast array of natural phenomena (See Figure 1). The melancholy humor was associated with black bile, a cold temperature, dryness, the direction north, the planet Saturn, the season of winter, the element earth, the astrological signs Cancer, Pisces and Scorpio, and old age. As John Selden wrote in 1614, repeating a Galenic commonplace, "The Mind's inclination follows the Bodies Temperature" (qtd. in Paster 77). Natural forces, such as those associated with melancholy could also affect the body's temperature, and so the internal workings of the mind and body were inextricably connected to the natural world. The mind, body, and natural world, thus, are not seen as mutually exclusive but each function entirely in conjunction with each other. In terms of ecocriticism, then, the Elizabethan view of humors and their natural associations reinforces the idea of the interconnectivity between humans and the natural world. There is no real dichotomy, between the natural world and man, but rather an interconnectedness that transcends such delineation. I will explore this interconnectivity at length in the following discussion of Jaques from *As You Like It* and Hamlet.

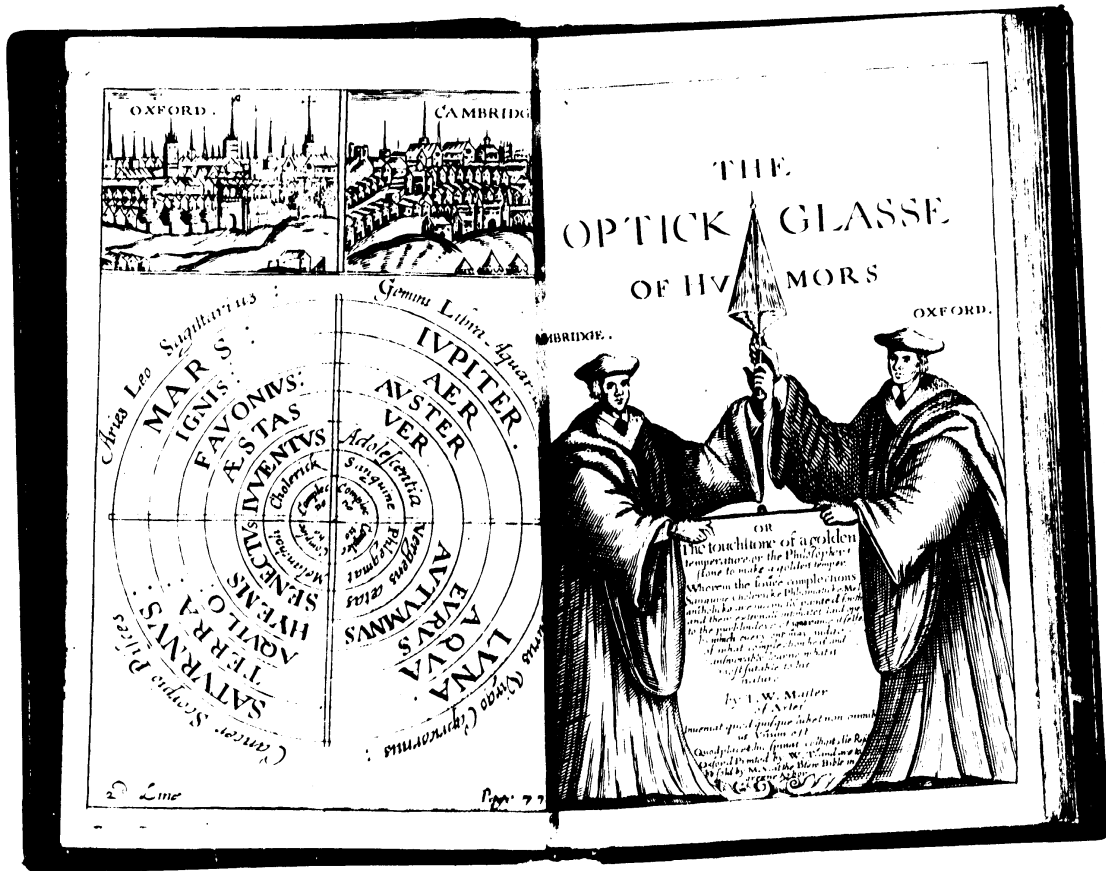


Figure 1 (Walkington)

CHAPTER 1

Spleen in the Green World: Jaques, Melancholy, and Nature in *As You Like It*

When asked whether he thinks that he is better than giant kelp, a man's response might likely be an affronted, "Of course!" He, unfortunately, would have plenty of company. As ecocritic Lynn White suggests, in the Christian tradition, man has from the beginning claimed dominion over animals, plants, and all things natural on this earth (kelp included). The belief that all things are subservient to him has given the western, Christian man free license to do with the natural world as he pleases, since after all, everything in nature was created solely for his pleasure. In this way, man has justified polluting the earth, invading ecosystems and decimating natural diversity. Other cultures—American Indians, Hindus and Buddhists—believe that a spirit courses through every living thing. As a result of this belief, they exhibit a greater respect for the natural world and a greater predilection to think that giant kelp have just as much right to existence as humans. Today, ecologists fight not only for kelp's right to life, but also for the protection of the ecosystem both it and we call home. When Shakespeare was writing, the term "ecologist" did not exist, and even though the humoral theory and its stress of the interconnectivity between man and nature was commonplace, the Christian worldview that asserted man's dominion over all things natural prevailed. Through the character of Jaques, however, Shakespeare seems to challenge this point of view in *As You Like It*, a play greatly concerned not only with human nature but also with man's relationship to the natural world. Shakespeare makes use of the natural environment in his play in order to further explore the inner-workings of human nature. In this way, he foreshadows the issues that concern the twenty-first-century ecocritic, who seeks to illuminate how we think about, write about and experience

nature. Using the lens of ecocriticism to explore the character of Jaques, one gains a greater understanding of human nature and man's relationship to the natural world.

In crafting his characters, Shakespeare could draw upon a rich variety of medical texts steeped in the Galenic theory of humors, the basis of early modern medical discourse. Melancholy, one of these humors, received an exhaustive treatment in Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie* which, as the title suggests, was devoted wholly to the subject. In the case of *As You Like It*, Shakespeare at times lifts an idea directly from Bright's text, which contradicts Babb's claim that one should not "assume that Shakespeare had read a book about melancholy" (*Elizabethan Malady* 107). Bright, in his *Treatise*, claims that "[a]ll perturbations are either simple or compounded of the simple. Simple are such as have no mixture of any other perturbations" (qtd. in Heffernan 99-100). Carol Falvo Heffernan points out that this idea was popular in medical texts during Shakespeare's day, so it is not surprising to find an echo of this notion in Jaques's description of his own melancholy. At the conclusion of Jaques's laundry list of melancholies that do not apply to him, he determines that his "is a melancholy of [his] own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects" (4.1.14-15). Jaques further describes his melancholy as "the sundry contemplation of [his] travels, in which [his] often rumination wraps [him] in a most humorous sadness" (4.1.15-19). He identifies here, based on Elizabethan medical theory, a natural cause for his melancholy: his description of a "humorous sadness" (4.1.19) points to an imbalance of the humors because an excess of *altra-bilis* can account for at least part of Jaques's melancholy. The extant medical knowledge at the time, then, facilitated an abundance of poetry devoted to the subject in Shakespeare's writing. The playwright could also rely on his audience's familiarity with the ideas put forth by Bright and his contemporaries concerning melancholy and some of its associations, including old age, winter,

and the gloomy Saturn. Since, as Draper notes, melancholy is “entirely under the evil and dangerous influence of Saturn” (63), the planet and its characteristics will become important later in a discussion of the speech concerning the seven ages of man.

Medical theory in the Elizabethan period distinguished between two major forms of melancholy, “natural” and “unnatural.” Natural melancholy was black, and consisted of what Thomas Elyot describes as the “dregges of pure blood” (qtd. in Draper 70), while Heffernan describes natural melancholy as being “normal in quality and excessive in quantity” (98). Unnatural melancholy, on the other hand, results from what Elyot and subsequently Heffernan call “adustion” or “the burning of any of the four humors” (Heffernan 98). Heffernan posits that Jaques’s melancholy results specifically from phlegmatic adustion. This raises the question, “What exactly makes something natural or unnatural?” The word “natural” carries with it a denotation of being “essentially connected with, relating to, or belonging to a person or thing” (OED “normal” 2d). Since humors are “essentially connected with the body,” by definition they can be termed “natural.” The notion of a natural humor like melancholy being termed “unnatural” or “not in accordance or agreement with the usual course of nature,” may seem contradictory on the surface, but this definition of unnatural is probably what humorists meant when they termed “unnatural melancholy,” seeing the ideal course of nature as the four humors balanced. The distinction between natural and unnatural melancholy was useful in Shakespeare’s day; however, from an ecological perspective “unnatural” melancholy directly results from the adustion of natural humors, which would make it by very definition natural. The question still remains whether the terms “natural” and “unnatural” are ontologically sound. Logically speaking, unnatural melancholy and natural melancholy are both natural inasmuch as they both result from the nature of the person who experiences the melancholy.

Critics for the past century have debated not whether Jaques experiences natural or unnatural melancholy but whether he is melancholy at all or is simply posing. Those critics with favorable readings of Jaques's character believe that he actually does suffer from a form of melancholy. Heffernan sees Jaques as a comic prefiguring of Hamlet, arguably Shakespeare's greatest portrayer of melancholy on stage. While Hamlet's melancholy has a complex set of external causes (his father's death and mother's "o'er hasty marriage" to his uncle, his inability to return to school, and Ophelia's rejection of him and he of her), Jaques's melancholy is of simpler origins. However, both men are genuine in their melancholy: they "know not seems" (*Hamlet* 1.2.76) in their verbal and physical expressions of melancholy. Heffernan suggests that Jaques suffers from phlegmatic adustion, and is not assuming a façade and supports these assertions by noting several nineteenth-century scholars who view Jaques in the same positive light and analyze him under the assumption that he was a melancholy philosopher. Another critic, Gene Fendt, in an argument positing the existence of comic catharsis in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, suggests that one type of catharsis, represented by Jaques, recognizes the attraction and goodness of the comic ending but chooses to leave it, as Jaques does in the final scene, because of his genuine melancholy. Panofsky also believes that Jaques truly suffers from melancholy but points out something that other critics have embraced, the idea that Jaques is "put[ting] an antic disposition on" (*Hamlet* 1.5.173). However, Panofsky still maintains that "Jaques...uses the mask of a melancholic by fashion and snobbery to hide the fact that he is a genuine one" (qtd. in Heffernan 103). He claims, then, that even though Jaques puts on a good show, this performance only hides the genuine melancholy Jaques experiences.

As noted, not every critic shares a sympathetic view of Jaques's melancholy. Critics tending toward negative readings of Jaques's character see his melancholy as mere posturing.

Robert Bennett argues that Jaques is a malcontent who feigns melancholy as a “fashionable pose” (192). He further contends that “for understanding Jaques...fashion must not be confused with reality” (192). Another critic, E. Michael Thron, in his discussion of Jaques’s affinity toward emblemizing on everyday occurrences in the forest, concurs with Bennett, maintaining that “[Jaques’s] melancholy is that of the fashionable satirist” (88), and that Jaques only presents a “façade of melancholy and deep experience” (84). Draper, in his sweeping survey of melancholics in Shakespeare’s works, agrees with Bennett and Thron and considers Jaques’s melancholy merely an “elegant affectation” (77). This notion of melancholy as something “fashionable” appears frequently in discourse concerning Jaques. Whereas today people commonly associate melancholy with suicide and depression and definitely not elegance or high fashion, in Shakespeare’s day, it was thought of as an aristocratic ailment in that it not only imbues one with wit, but also, as Draper notes, a “deeper understanding of others” (77), which in these critics’ views give Jaques reason enough to clothe himself in this affectation. In the end, Draper deems melancholy, indeed, “the proper style for the fine and traveled Jaques” (77). These critics, then, reach the consensus that when Jaques exhibits behaviors characteristic of a melancholic person, these are a mere show and prove Jaques is only melancholic insofar as it seems fashionable.

Contrary to these claims that Jaques’s melancholy is merely a “fashionable pose,” I agree with Heffernan and Panofsky in arguing that Jaques experiences genuine melancholy. Melancholy, actually, would appear ingrained into his very nature, a result of not only a dominant melancholy disposition based on an excess of black bile but also, perhaps a case of phlegmatic adustion. Jaques is well-versed in the types of melancholy: he experiences

[n]either the scholar's melancholy which is emulation, nor the musician's which is fantastical, nor the courtier's, which is proud, nor the soldier's which is ambitious, nor the lawyer's, which is politic, nor the lady's, which is nice, nor the lover's which is all these. (4.1.10-14)

This laundry list may seem satirical, but underneath the surface is the idea that his melancholy is of a kind particular to him and deeply felt. In a conversation with Amiens, Jaques claims that he can “suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs” (2.5.11-12). Extracting melancholy from the world around him, then, is as natural, and destructive, to him as a weasel sucking eggs. Jaques further exhibits a variety of characteristics symptomatic of melancholy. In addition to being prone to what Duke Senior calls “sullen fits” (2.1.67), Jaques also has trouble sleeping (2.5.57), insomnia being a characteristic symptom of melancholy then as it is of depression at present. Jaques further tells Rosalind that he “love[s melancholy] better than laughing” (4.1.4). If one finds it hard to believe Jaques, one need only look so far as the play's other characters: Duke Senior, Rosalind, Orlando, and the lords all refer to Jaques as “melancholy” throughout the play, and each comments either positively or negatively on Jaques's wit. Melancholy, according to the early modern medical discourse, is associated closely with wit. L. Limnius, one of Shakespeare's contemporary medical scholars, affirms that melancholy “causeth and bringeth forth sharpnesse of witte, excellency of learning...eloquence of tongue” (qtd. in Draper 65-66). The trait of wit that is so closely associated with melancholy characterizes Jaques perfectly.

Jaques's wit makes itself evident throughout the play. In the first mention of Jaques, Duke Senior remarks that he “love[s] to cope [Jaques] in these sullen fits,/For then he's full of matter” (2.1.67-68). Like the controversy over whether Jaques is melancholy, in the play, a slight controversy exists over whether Jaques is actually witty. While Duke Senior finds him

“full of matter,” Orlando insults Jaques, deeming his wit subpar and unoriginal: he “answer[s] from a] right painted cloth, from whence he ha[s] studied [his] questions” (3.2.251-52). Orlando implies that Jaques’ wit is merely something he acquired from assimilating popular sayings rather than an actual humoral condition. Despite Orlando’s misgivings, Jaques demonstrates sharp wit not only in his conversations with Duke Senior, but also the Fool, the lords, and Rosalind. Concerning wit, Bright invokes the natural image of burning wood to describe the reason that melancholy (which is a dry humor) is associated with a quick wit: “Sometimes it falleth out, that melancholic men are found verie wittie, and quickly discerne: either because the humore of melancholie with some heate is so mad subtile, that as from the driest woode risest the clearest flame” (qtd. in Heffernan 104). The experiences from his life and travels that have left Jaques melancholy and dry have also given him knowledge, sharpening and sparking his witty repartee with other characters. Perhaps, also, melancholy leads to wittiness because melancholics are usually contemplative. Jaques specifically mentions his “sundry contemplation” (4.1.16) and “often rumination” (4.1.17), and this would give him an abundance of opportunity to hone his thoughts and wit. This wit most notably evidences itself in his philosophizing on the weeping deer and his speech concerning the seven ages of man.

This predisposition toward wit would help to explain why Jaques finds himself fascinated and overly-excited by the fool. This fascination centers on the fool’s ability to judge human nature freely, and the preoccupation appears, actually, to be an obsession bordering on mania: in Jaques’s first mention of him, he uses the word “fool” five times in just three lines. Shakespeare named this fool Touchstone, and, fittingly, he “serves to test the genuineness or value of anything” (OED “touchstone” 2), specifically those men and women around him. Jaques, who shares wit as a characteristic with the fool, is impressed by Touchstone and drawn to the “deep-

contemplative” (2.7.31) nature of his wit. Jaques and the fool see the world more clearly than those around them and are thus able to “rail.../in good set terms” (2.7.15-16) against the ill natures of man. This identification with the fool, thus, lends a sense of genuineness to the wit and melancholy so intrinsic to Jaques’s nature. Touchstone’s name further has natural and metallurgical roots because a touchstone is “a very smooth...variety of quartz or jasper used for testing the quality of gold or silver alloys by the color of the streak produced by rubbing them upon it” (OED “touchstone” 1). When Jaques rubs elbows with Touchstone for the first time, the fool quips to him that “from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,/And then from hour to hour we rot and rot” (2.7.26-27). This statement concerning the degradation of man associated with the passage of time, once one looks beyond the imbedded sexual puns, confirms the genuineness of Jaques’s speech concerning the seven ages of man, which he delivers later in the same scene. Touchstone, at this first meeting, causes “Monsignor Melancholy” (3.2.290) to “laugh sans intermission/an hour by his dial” (2.7.32-33), something usually uncharacteristic of his melancholy. Jaques insists that, were he allowed a fool’s motley coat, he would “through and through/cleanse the foul body of th’infected world” (2.7.59-60). Again, even when he is excited about the fool, his melancholic nature points to the corrupt nature of the human world around him, focusing in part upon the state of man’s destructive relationship with the natural world. His chief interest in playing the part of the fool and wearing motley revolves around the fool’s wit and the license the fool enjoys to rail freely on the ill natures of others. However, Duke Senior points out that Jaques himself was once a “libertine/as sensual as the brutish sting itself” (2.7.65-66), so it would appear that Jaques once had the kind of unseemly nature he would like to rail against. This scene of Jaques gushing over the fool could be viewed as a sort of brief manic episode, since Jaques goes from being ridiculously over-excited about the fool to, approximately

50 lines later, delivering an overtly melancholic speech outlining the seven ages of man. In reference to shifts in mood, Draper explains that melancholy “is the furthest of the humors from the Aristotlean mean; for such men were thought to oscillate like sufferers today from manic-depressive psychosis” (62). This sheds light on the reason for some of the sudden shifts in Jaques’s moods.

Thus far, I have focused on human nature, specifically on Jaques’s melancholic nature, what it means to be melancholy, the controversy over the genuineness of Jaques’s melancholy, and my assertion that melancholy is ingrained into his very nature. It is important though, at this juncture, to note that Shakespeare’s exploration of human nature in this play takes place almost exclusively in a natural setting, the Forest of Ardenne. Jaques, in his melancholic state, thrives on images he encounters in the natural world and employs them to comment on the nature of the men around him. This alone warrants an ecocritical reading. But beyond this, I will argue that Jaques manifests a nascent ecologically-sound view of the world illustrated by his interactions with the ecosystem surrounding him.

The first introduction of Jaques emphasizes not only his melancholic nature, but also his close relationship to the natural world. As mentioned earlier, Heffernan asserts that “Jaques seems to be melancholy because of the adustion of phlegm” (105), and those suffering from this type of melancholy are said to be attracted to water. Since the humoral state of phlegmatic adustion is dry, in order to regain a humoral balance, the sufferer needs to take in, or at least be in close proximity to, the element of water. As such, it naturally follows that in the reader’s first glimpse of “the melancholy Jaques,/[he is watching a deer] on the extremest verge of the swift *brook*/ [a]ugmenting it with *tears*” (2.1.41-43 emphasis added). The images of water continue to compound, since Jaques finds himself weeping near a body of water because of the weeping

deer, who is described as “weeping into a needless stream” (2.2.56). Consequently, and in addition to this overwhelming attraction to water, Jaques is also drawn to other aspects of nature, including flora and fauna. In their first description of Jaques, the lords describe him as being

...under an oak whose antic root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood
To which place a poor sequestered stag
That from the hunter’s aim had taken hurt
Did come to languish. (2.1.31-34)

From the beginning, then, Shakespeare defines Jaques’s character in his relationship to the natural world around him. Later in the play, Duke Senior says of Jaques, “I think he be transformed into a beast,/For I can nowhere find him like a man” (2.7.1-2). Duke Senior associates Jaques intimately and inseparably with the natural world. In his mind, Jaques’s concern for the natural world (the trees, the water, the deer) has caused him to become absorbed into the environment. Jaques’s “weeping and commenting/upon the sobbing deer” (2.1.65-66), finally, tell us much about his melancholy: the state of his humors causes him to weep; he finds himself attracted to water; and from an ecological point of view, he sympathizes and identifies with a wounded deer.

In his melancholic state, Jaques’s lament on the dying deer further illustrates his deep connection with the natural world. In the beginning, the lords report to Duke Senior that they left Jaques

...swearing that [they]
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what’s worse
To fright the animals and to kill them up

In their assigned and native dwelling place. (2.1.60-63)

Jaques recognizes the inalienable right that the deer have to live in their native habitat free from the encroachment and violence of mankind. His response to the deer's plight illustrates his viewpoint that all God's creatures have an equal right to existence, a way of thinking that does not distinguish between humans and other forms of nature. The displacement of the deer, the rightful citizens of the forest, offends Jaques, and seeing the deer with a fatal wound inflicted by a man profoundly affects Jaques, causing him not only to weep but also to rail against the injustices forced on nature by mankind. Bennett, though, offers a scathing critique of Jaques's reaction to the deer's death:

[T]he deer do not possess moral reason and free will as man does; hence, Jaques mistakes their nature when he measures their actions by a standard of responsibility that is properly demanded only of humans...The absurdity of holding that man should obey in his relationship with animals the same laws that bind him with members of his own kind becomes clear... we must...discard the less obvious but equally distorted notion that men can tyrannize deer. (196)

Ecologically speaking, Jaques's reaction is far from absurd. Though Bennett's label of absurdity proceeds logically from a traditional standpoint, what one should label as absurd is the callously anthropocentric view that sees man as somehow superior and dominant over all areas of nature. This way of looking at the world, however, has dominated human history and can be traced back to Genesis. White explicates this ill-founded view:

Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in physical creation had any purpose

save to serve man's purpose...Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects (9-10).

Jaques's conception of the deer and their place in nature diametrically opposes this view espoused by Bennett and explicated by White. He here takes the part of the deer against man's. Instead of dominion, Jaques offers a view in which deer, and by extension other living creatures, receive respect from humans. This view maintains that humans have the same responsibilities to other living creatures (not to tyrannize, usurp, or frighten) as they have toward other humans. Jaques's exposition on the deer asserts that other living creatures have rights to life and existence, the same as man. Bennett's speciesist point of view, on the other hand, highlights a way of thinking that has led to the tyrannizing of not only the deer, but all the natural world.

The tyrannizing of the deer reflects other forms of tyranny found in the play. Men tyrannize deer for much the same reason rulers tyrannize their subjects: they see themselves as having dominion and absolute power. Just as a tyrant feels justified killing anyone for any reason with no sense of repercussions, so a man can go into the forest and kill any animal for any reason, again, with no sense of repercussions. The tyrant's subjects have no legal recourse in the same way that deer have no way to fight back against their oppressors. Since he believes he has dominion over animals, man sees himself as superior to the deer. But even if one takes dominion as a given, this rule does not necessarily have to lead to tyranny. Duke Senior rules benevolently and treats those "lower" on the socio-political hierarchy with respect. When Duke Senior is physically threatened by Orlando, who enters, sword drawn, to demand food, Duke Senior does not order his men to kill Orlando, but rather bids him "[s]it down and feed. Welcome to our table" (2.7.104). Duke Senior's example contrasts starkly with the tyranny practiced by his younger brother. Duke Frederick arbitrarily banishes his niece, Rosalind, simply

because she is “[her] father’s daughter” (1.3.52), and beyond that, threatens to have her killed if she is found within twenty miles of court. When trying to locate his daughter, who has fled as a result of this tyranny, he believes Orlando is somehow involved. Duke Frederick threatens more violence in demanding that Oliver produce Orlando “dead or living” (3.2.6). He also arbitrarily seizes “all things [Oliver] dost call [his]” (3.2.9) until he produces Orlando. The tyrannical nature of Duke Frederick, thus, mirrors the tyrannical nature of hunters, who arbitrarily inflict violence on the deer and stake claim on the land that once belonged to the deer.

Jaques further interprets the deer’s suffering as emblematic not only of the way man impinges upon the natural world, but also the way humans interact with each other. Jaques sees the events of life as what Thron calls “emblems for moral satire” (84), but rather than typical moralizing, Jaques projects his own personal moral onto the more traditional emblems. According to Thron, the weeping deer, or weeping hart, is an emblem traditionally associated with incurable love, but Jaques uses it to attack “country, city, [and] court” (2.2.59). Jaques does not interpret things traditionally but rather satirically to his own ends, an effect no doubt of his wit tinged with melancholy:

...[the deer] being there alone,
Left and abandoned of his velvet friend,
‘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 should you look

Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?' (2.2.49-57)

His moralizing, using the natural image of a deer as his emblem, focuses on the way human beings treat each other when one experiences pain. The “fat and greasy citizens” have no desire to burden themselves with the pain of another. While this may not seem to ring true for all of human nature, Jaques in his melancholic state presages something Egan explains in the context of humans’ natural impulse to help their relatives: “When the cost of helping is low, and the benefit to the recipient is high... then even a small chance that the relative has the same gene is worth taking” (53). When people are not related to one another in a biological sense, it is less within their nature to help each other. And so, Jaques’s lament on the insensitivity of the deer, and by extension man, is not so far-fetched. Jaques emblemizes and learns lessons from the deer but does not take advantage of the other tradition associated with the hart’s tear: a hart’s tear cures melancholy. Egan cites Winifred Schleiner, who “draws attention to the contemporary belief that the tear of a stag (the *lapis bezoar*) was itself medicinal to the melancholic” (102). Jaques, though, refuses the medicine, perhaps because he does not believe he has a right to take something from the deer for his own benefit, and the hart’s tear, instead of curing his melancholy, sends him into a “sullen fit” (2.1.67) of weeping and moralizing.

Though it concerns a dying deer, Act 4, Scene 2, taken by itself, shows a Jaques who could be interpreted as anything but an environmentalist. This tiny scene, on the surface seems to contradict the image of Jaques as a nascent animal-rights activist. On the surface, it appears that he is lauding one of the lords who killed a deer; however, taken in conjunction with the other opinions Jaques expresses in the play, this scene presents another example of his satiric anatomizing of human nature. In an earlier scene wherein he moralizes on the dying deer, Jaques speaks of the relationship between man and deer in political terms, saying of Duke Senior, “[he]

do[es] more usurp/Than doth [his] brother that hath banished [him].” (2.1.26-28). Act 4, Scene 2, then, begins with an accusatory question from Jaques: “Which is he that killed the deer?” (4.2.1). His suggestion in this scene, that the foresters “present [the lord who killed the deer] to the Duke like a/Roman conqueror...[and] set the deer’s horns/ Upon his head for a branch of victory” (4.2.3-5), again points to and politicizes man’s destructive interaction with the natural world. In Jaques’s way of viewing the world, the lord who killed the deer is pillaging nature as if he were a conquering army. In another light, Jaques’s suggestion of presenting the lord as a “conqueror” wearing “a branch of victory” aggrandizes the lord’s senseless and destructive actions, underscoring the satirical intent of the scene.

We have established that Jaques cares about the fate of animals, but could he be considered a tree-hugger, too? Throughout the play, the proto-ecologist Jaques shows a great concern for the natural world extending beyond wildlife specifically to trees. At his first introduction, when he is moralizing on the deer, the lords find him reclining “under an oak” (2.1.31) and from this significantly green beginning, Jaques continues to be associated with trees until the play ends with Jaques’ decision to remain among the trees in the forest. Throughout, he shows his regard for trees by responding enthusiastically, “More, more, I prithee more,” (2.5.9) to a song that begins “Under the greenwood tree” (2.5.1). When he encounters Orlando, who has been carving poems into trees, Jaques admonishes him saying, “I pray you mar no more trees with writing love-songs in their barks” (3.2.237-38). Orlando wants to express himself and his love for Rosalind to everyone in the forest, but he does not consider that the trees are living organisms who could be harmed by his carving into their flesh. For him, these trees are merely paper to leave his mark upon. Jaques’s statement illustrates a concern not only for deer and animals, but also those supposedly lower on the great chain of being. His affinity for and

defense of trees leads me to believe that perhaps, had he known they existed, Jaques might have, indeed, had kind words to say about the likes of giant kelp.

Jaques further aligns himself with nature in perhaps his most well-known speech, the one concerning the seven ages of man, wherein he offers a universal view of the natural process of aging. Alan Taylor Bradford notes that ages-of-man speeches were common in Shakespeare's day, and although the number of ages varied from four to seven, usually the magic number used to divide life into its ages was seven: Bradford states that "[t]he common rationale for all seven-ages schemes is astrological and...in such schemes the ages correspond in number, sequence and characteristics to the planetary spheres" (173). This alignment with the spheres gives Jaques's speech cosmic significance. His invocation of the natural, yet otherworldly, planetary spheres seems a logical progression from water, to trees, to deer, to now talking about humans in their relationship to the entire universe. His speech shows the interconnectedness of not only life as it exists on our planet, but also connection on a more vast and cosmic scale. Bradford further explains that the seven ages are associated with the characteristics of the seven planets, and Jaques ousts the sun's sphere and replaces it with another age of Saturn, a planet thought, as Draper notes, to have an "evil and dangerous influence" (63) and is also the planet that rules melancholy. Saturn's gloom spreads throughout the spheres and, so, throughout the ages of man. Bradford posits that "to manipulate [the framework of the seven ages of man schema] would be, by analogy to juggle the spheres and thus disrupt the stability of the Ptolemaic universe, which is exactly what Jaques does in order to accommodate his own perverse and eccentric view of life" (173). Bradford's critique of Jaques's intentions is more than a little harsh. Jaques's melancholy nature affects the way he interprets the span of human life, and as such, Jaques did not juggle planets for the sake of juggling—his melancholy nature dictates the way in which he views the

world and, consequently, the spheres. Furthermore, far from “disrupt[ing] the stability of the...universe,” Jaques and his melancholy actually contribute to the stability of the natural world, insomuch as his melancholy nature helps to balance a forest full of sanguine lovers.

Looking beyond the cosmic nature of the speech, when Jaques moralizes on the seven natural ages of man, he also offers an insightful, if melancholic, look into the nature of the passage of time. This emotionally charged speech, while completely fatalistic, remains an entirely accurate way of viewing life. Regardless of its cynicism, the speech concerning the seven ages of man follows the natural and linear progression of time, beginning at the “entrance” (2.7.140) and ending at the “exit” (2.7.140). Adam’s arrival, directly following this speech, rather than undercutting the meaning as Bennett suggests, rather reinforces the notion of a “second childishness” (2.7.164), since Adam must be carried in by Orlando like a child and “scarce can speak” (2.7.169). In the same way that the final age ends with man “sans everything” (2.7.165), so Adam appears sans home, sans money, sans livelihood, and sans vitality. Adam is the realization of the end result of Jaques’s natural view of the progression of time with one notable exception: he is not sans friends, since Orlando risks his life to care for him. Bennett’s further evidence that this speech does not constitute a realistic way for Jaques to look at the world is that “by defining man solely in terms of the physiological restrictions of a life span, the vision fails to distinguish man from other living creatures” (197). Here, again, Bennett’s complaint that Jaques does not “distinguish man from other living creatures” points to his own speciesism and does not explore the implications of Shakespeare, through Jaques, not making that distinction. Shakespeare here emphasizes that all life on earth has a beginning and an end in temporal terms. All living creatures are in this world together, however bleak the outlook.

Jaques's feelings about human nature as well as the nature of the world color the final scene of the play, which presents an ambiguous picture of Jaques's melancholy. Bennett maintains that, in this scene, Jaques is cleansed of the melancholy and malcontent he has affected over the course of the play. He points to Jaques's final long speech at the end of Act 5 as evidence of this conversion. This speech only offers marginal proof, though, that a real change has occurred and that Jaques has been truly cleansed. He does begin this long speech with benevolent words for Orlando and Rosalind, Oliver and Celia, and Duke Senior, but with Sylvius and Touchstone, he degenerates into a lewd parody of Hymen's speech of blessing to the soon-to-be-wed couples. Jaques leaves these couples to their merriment, confirming that he is "for other than for dancing measures" (5.4.192). He, thus, draws a line between himself and the love, connection, and joy symbolized by "dancing measures." Fendt maintains that Jaques "comes to recognize desire's goodness in Arden...blesses the green world but lets it be...such a Jaques transfigures the play's beautiful comic resolution into a sublime one" (254). Though Jaques leaves the company of others, he also plans, after spending some time in an abandoned cave in the forest, to seek out the company of Duke Frederick and his men, who will take Duke Senior's and the foresters' place in Ardenne. Jaques's interest in Duke Frederick and his men centers on his belief that "out of these convertites /there is much to be heard and learned" (5.4.183-4). Jaques now plans on learning from others whereas before he was content to teach them their faults and the faults of human nature. A sense of humility has crept into his nature, then, and so a subtle change does appear in Jaques's nature in the end.

Jaques, though, finds himself left out of the traditional comic ending of love and marriage. The natural state of the world is characterized by love, union, and reproduction, and this kind of love brings the couples together in the closing scene of *As You Like It*. The love that Jaques has for

Duke Senior, a love that causes him to abandon his lands in the beginning to live in the forest, seems in the end to have been less about his love for Duke Senior and more about a desire to be cut off from the constructions of society. Jaques does not leave with the rest of the merry foresters of Ardenne to go back to the courtly world. As Fendt states, Jaques, “at the end, loves the green world and sees its goodness” (252). He, thus, chooses instead to remain in Ardenne with the deer and the trees, to immerse himself in the dynamics of life in the natural world. His nature seems such that Jaques more closely allies himself with the natural forest than the people inhabiting that forest. People come and go in the green world, but for Jaques, nature and melancholy endure. Jaques’s keen awareness of man’s role in nature is evidenced in his lamentations concerning the dying deer, which show an understanding of man’s responsibility to the natural world and an exhortation to treat nature with the same respect that one treats other men. His fatalistic speech concerning the seven ages of man also does not differentiate between man and other forms of nature in the temporal sphere. His preoccupation with the fool and his ability to point out the flaws in others urges man to reexamine his own corrupt nature. Shakespeare, through Jaques, challenges readers to reexamine their relationships with nature and also with each other and make adjustments to their lives accordingly. Ecocritics, in the same way, hope with their writing to change the way humans think about nature, so that the way Jaques feels about deer will become the way humans think about giant kelp.

CHAPTER 2

“All moods, forms, shapes of grief:” An Ecocritical Perspective on *Hamlet*’s Melancholy

Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*, both written around 1601, encompass some similar themes of family issues: brothers betraying brothers, uncles plotting the assassination of their kin, and a son struggling with the loss of a father. Melancholy, too, plays a prominent role in the action of both plays. The treatment of these sundry themes, though, is transformed significantly between the genre of comedy in *As You Like It* and the tragedy of *Hamlet*. Russ McDonald, in his discussion of genres, states that “in most comedy, the happy ending involves a marriage or at least some kind of union or reunion” (153). In fact, marriage was an ending that the Elizabethans would have come to expect in a comedy, and accordingly, *As You Like It* ends with five marriages in the Forest of Ardenne. The ecological implications of comedy are also clear: “Sexual union was seen as the happy conclusion that will perpetuate the species” (McDonald 153). On the contrary, “Death is the tragic counterpart to the marriage that concludes comedy” (McDonald 157), and in keeping with this theme, *Hamlet* ends with the death of every major character in the play, an ending typical of Elizabethan tragedies. In ecological terms, these deaths mean an end to the genetic line of both Hamlet’s and Polonius’s families. McDonald notes that “nature seems to endorse amorous or procreative desires” (155), an observation illustrated in *As You Like It* as the Forest of Ardenne offers a place for the lovers’ love to blossom. However, in tragedy, “nature seems to conspire against humans rather than cooperate with them” (McDonald 158), so that *As You Like It*’s accommodating forest becomes the garden in *Hamlet* serving as accomplice to Claudius and providing an opportunity to kill King Hamlet. Whereas Jaques acts as a foil to the sanguine lovers coming together at the end of

As You Like It, effectively living outside the constructs of his genre, the tragedy of Hamlet's situation is essential to understanding the tragedy of the play. In keeping with this dichotomy of genres, a bleaker outlook than my treatment of Jaques's melancholy will color my study of the tragic nature of Hamlet's melancholy in this chapter. My discussion will explore the interconnection between nature and the culture of medicine in Elizabethan England, focusing on the causes and ambiguity of Hamlet's melancholy. I will also examine acting and melancholy as forces of nature within the play, and will culminate in a study of the connection between natural as well as supernatural issues surrounding the act of suicide, the ultimate disconnect, in early modern England.

A discussion of the subject of melancholy in *Hamlet* might seem to some as much the same as beating a dead horse. What more can be contributed to the critical conversation that hasn't already been said in the hundreds of years of criticism since the play's first appearance in the early seventeenth century? I believe that we can breathe new life into this dead horse, and give it a carrot to chew on, by considering Hamlet's melancholy from an ecocritical perspective, by looking at the very nature of his melancholy and how his temperament and affect are interdependent upon forces in the natural world. Although critic Babb suggests that "[i]t may be that a knowledge of human nature is more necessary to the understanding of Hamlet than a knowledge of Elizabethan melancholy" (*Elizabethan Malady* 109), I will argue that the two—human nature and the Elizabethan medical conception of melancholy—are inextricably linked. Human nature, in the Elizabethan era, was widely thought to be a result of the ebb and flow of the four humors within a person and the elements without. As Paster notes, the "humoral subject [has] full immersion in and continuous interaction with a constantly changing natural and cultural environment" (60): humans are inextricably connected, in the Elizabethan theory of

medicine, to the natural world around them. The link between the humors, human nature, and the natural world, from an ecological perspective, opens up a new line of conversation in the discussion of Hamlet's melancholy. As Glotfelty maintains, "All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture" (xix). Therefore, an ecocritical exploration of Hamlet's melancholy will point to the interconnections evident between the culture of Elizabethan medical discourse evinced in melancholy and the natural world's intrinsic involvement in Hamlet's humoral imbalance.

In considering Hamlet's imbalance, a survey of the criticism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries reveals a complete lack of consensus on the question of the authenticity of Hamlet's melancholy. In the mid-twentieth century, A.P. Stabler, in his discussion of the influence of the Saxo Grammaticus and Belleforest source texts on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, briefly analyzes the predilection that melancholy people have for Satanic influence, but ultimately sees "(thwarted) ambition" (209) as the cause of Hamlet's genuine melancholy. Along these same lines, Lawrence Babb, in his study of how Hamlet's melancholy makes him easy prey for the devil, accepts Hamlet's melancholy as a given and discusses how sixteenth century physicians believed that the devil could lure melancholic souls into madness. Early twenty-first century critic Paster, concerned more with the natural than the supernatural in her study of the significant role that the humors play in Shakespeare's work, determines that although Hamlet is predominantly melancholy, his humoral balance is in constant flux as his body reacts to changes in the physical, social, and cultural world around him, maintaining that "the volatility that characterizes Hamlet's behaviors and moods...is to be understood...as a humoral inevitability given the myriad complexities of his predicament" (60). Bridget Gellert

explores the “iconography of melancholy in the graveyard scene” suggesting that Hamlet has a melancholic disposition throughout the play but in the graveyard scene puts off the antic disposition evident in most of the play, concluding that melancholy “defines the distance between Hamlet and the other characters” (57-58). Carol Thomas Neely focuses on the basic tenets of the major Renaissance works on melancholy (Bright, Burton, DuLaurens) and shows how these authors work to separate the spiritual, supernatural, and physiological causes of melancholy. Neely’s analysis results in her diagnosis of Hamlet’s “feigned male melancholy” (323). Carol Falvo Heffernan, also interested in the literature of contemporary Elizabethan medical discourse, but less concerned with whether or not Hamlet is melancholy (she leans more toward the melancholic disease), discusses how Shakespeare’s use of Renaissance physicians’ work shaped Hamlet’s character and how the character lends itself to Freudian psychoanalysis. Bennett Simon surveys the evolution of that kind of psychoanalytic criticism of Hamlet from the eighteenth century to the present, adding his own perspective, that Hamlet’s melancholy results from “trauma” (707).

Entering into the fray of this critical conversation, in my discussion of Hamlet, I will focus on the nature of his melancholy from a physiological, psychological and, most importantly, an ecological perspective. Like so many before me, I see melancholy is an integral part of Hamlet’s nature. My chief concern, however, is the idea that melancholy humor presides over his behavior and that melancholy, according to Elizabethan medical discourse is linked inextricably to the natural world. Neely notes that a delineation must be made between melancholy and madness, while Burton, an early modern medical scholar, maintains that they differ only in degree. Throughout this discussion, I maintain that Hamlet remains truly

melancholy throughout the majority of the play but that he puts on and off his antic disposition at will.

Shakespeare links Hamlet closely to melancholy as well as nature throughout the play. As Jaques moralized on the weeping stag, so Hamlet considers the worm and the fish, both animals having associations with melancholy and its more severe form, madness. Whereas the weeping stag offered water, a cure for dry melancholy, Hamlet's meditation on earth, worms, and a fish out of water further mire Hamlet in his melancholy and feigned madness. The element linked to melancholy is earth, part of the ecosystem that a worm calls home. Further, Elizabethan medical thought associated the astrological sign Pisces with melancholy, and Pisces is symbolized, of course, by a fish. So, when Hamlet speaks about the worm and the fish, Elizabethan audiences would have recognized these animals' relationship to the melancholy humor. In Act 4, Scene 2, when asked about the location of Polonius, Hamlet claims that "a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him" (4.2.20-21), pointing to the fact that Polonius's death now makes him food for worms. In a bit of madness with method to it, Hamlet further states that "a man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm...to show ...how a king might go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (4.2.26-31). This seemingly absurd, yet logically sound, argument points to the renewal of life, in that when a man dies, he becomes food for a worm, which becomes food for a fish, which in turn becomes food for a man. However, Hamlet tinges this natural process with the wholly unnatural idea of human cannibalism and focuses on the ignobility of death. If a king, in death, can "progress through the guts of a beggar," then having been a king means little or nothing in death. This natural imagery of worms, which Egan refers to "as a mantra for death" (111),

perhaps issues a warning to Claudius of what will happen to him when Hamlet finally acts on his father's demand for revenge.

Hamlet continues this theme of the ignobility of death, further connecting himself with the element earth and melancholy, in the graveyard scene. As Gellert notes, "the general association of graveyard and melancholy would, of course, have been obvious to Shakespeare's audience" (58) since "gravedigging was one of the lowly Saturnian and melancholic professions, and the earth in which they dug...was the element particularly associated with melancholy and Saturn" (61). Hamlet, a prince rather than a gravedigger, still finds himself intrigued by the gravediggers and picks up a skull they toss aside, the recently unearthed skull of his childhood friend Yorick. His contemplation of Yorick's skull leads him to consider that when a man dies, he returns to the dust of the earth, and so Hamlet's consideration of the skull prompts a thought concerning the ignobility of "death's ironical transformations" (118), a thought that is steeped in natural terms connected to melancholy. He contemplates thus:

Alexander dies, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust, dust is earth, of earth we make loam and who of that loam whereunto he was converted might not stop a beer-barrel?

Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay,

Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

O, that that earth which kept the world in awe

Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw. (5.1.191-198)

In this brief passage, he mentions the earth and its cognates seven times and also winter, all of which suggest close relationships with melancholy in humoral discourse. Further, his contemplation addresses the same idea he expresses to Claudius: no matter how important a man

is on earth, whether he be king or emperor, Caesar or Alexander, in death, he returns to dust and could be used to fix a wall or “stop a beer-barrel,” a completely undignified end to a seemingly dignified life. Hamlet’s preoccupation with death surfaces throughout the play and was thought common for those experiencing melancholy.

A significant number of the characters within the play believe that Hamlet suffers from some degree of melancholy and offer insights into the connection between Hamlet’s melancholy and its natural causes. As Robert Burton delves deeply into the causes of the melancholic medical condition in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, devoting an entire Partition and hundreds of pages to the treatment of the topic, Shakespeare’s characters concern themselves with discovering the root of Hamlet’s melancholy. Shakespeare’s characters, however, have much less noble motivations than Burton’s scholarly concern in discovering the causes of melancholy. Ingratiating himself and gaining favor with the king and queen motivate Polonius to search out the cause of Hamlet’s melancholy or madness. Since Polonius pronounces Hamlet mad on a number of occasions, Hamlet’s madness seems, from his perspective, a foregone conclusion. The reason behind Hamlet’s madness, to him, lies at the heart of the matter—“mad let us grant him, then, and now remains that we find out the cause of this effect” (2.2.100-1). In Elizabethan England, as I have suggested, the “cause and effect” is defined in natural terms. Burton defines the type of madness Polonius believes Hamlet suffers from as “a vehement dotage, or raving without a fever, far more violent than melancholy” (i.140), pointing to the connection between madness and temperature. Polonius can thus tell the King, “Your noble son is mad./ Mad I call it, for, to define true madness, / What is it but to be nothing else but mad” (2.2.92-94). When Polonius is sure that he’s “found the very cause of Hamlet’s lunacy” (2.2.48-9), he determines that Hamlet is “mad for [Ophelia’s] love” (2.1.87), stating that

This is the very ecstasy of love,
Whose violent property fordoes itself
And leads the will to desperate undertakings
As oft as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures. (2.1.104-8)

If Polonius's assertion is correct and Hamlet's melancholy results in love, a love that could result in a royal marriage, this would suit Polonius and his penchant for political maneuvering nicely. Although this diagnosis is one of convenience for Polonius, Burton would agree with the "violent property" of love, asserting that "if [love] rage...it is a disease, frenzy, madness" (i.149). Despite Polonius's insistence, it becomes increasingly apparent in the play that Hamlet's melancholy has less to do with his love for Ophelia and much more to do with the incestuous "love" between his mother and his uncle, a wholly unnatural connection.

Gertrude and Claudius, too, take on the task of determining the cause of Hamlet's melancholy and offer their own opinions concerning the nature of his disease. Claudius' concern with determining the "head and source of all [Gertrude's] son's distemper" (2.2.55) seems to have less to do with Hamlet and more to do with Denmark's political future but points to a humoral cause because the King wants to determine the nature of Hamlet's "temperature." Hamlet's melancholy is a matter of national importance because he stands next in line for the crown of Denmark; because his body is a microcosm for the body politic, the malady in his body becomes the malady of the whole country. Further, since the King is closely tied to the physical earth of his kingdom (the King of Denmark is referred to as simply, "Denmark"), Hamlet, next in line to be King, is again linked to the element most closely associated with melancholy and madness. As such, Claudius asserts that "madness in *great ones* must not unwatched go"

(3.1.191, emphasis added). However, his lack of concern for Hamlet as a person becomes apparent when he begins plotting Hamlet's death in the latter part of the play. But in the beginning, Claudius as well as Gertrude show great concern for what might be causing Hamlet's melancholy. With others onstage listening, Claudius contends that the cause of Hamlet's "turbulent and dangerous lunacy" (3.1.4) is his father's death, stating emphatically, "What should it be more than his father's death, that thus hath put him so much from th' understanding of himself, I cannot dream of." (2.2.7-10). Although self-serving, Claudius' appraisal reinforces Robert Burton's ecologically significant assertion regarding family bonds: "nature binds all creatures to love their young ones...so the same nature urgeth a man to love his parents...and this love cannot be dissolved...[and] is like an arch of stones, where if one be displaced, all comes down" (iii.31). The natural bond between Hamlet and his father has been broken in a completely unnatural way, fratricide. Hamlet's father was displaced, and now Hamlet is falling apart like an "arch of stones" with a missing member. But his father's death, as Gertrude points out, is not the only possible cause for Hamlet's melancholy. Gertrude's more apt description of the cause of Hamlet's melancholy takes into consideration both "his father's death and [Gertrude and Claudius'] o'er hasty marriage" (2.2.57). She acknowledges that both the death of a parent and the incestuous nature of her "o'erhasty marriage," forces from the outside world, could lead to the kind of distempered humor or melancholy affecting her son. Much the same as Polonius's motivation, Claudius' assessment is self-serving—he needs to make sure that Hamlet does not know, or suspect, that Claudius murdered King Hamlet, so Claudius wants to point to other causes for Hamlet's madness.

The prognostications of his "aunt-mother" (2.2.376) and "uncle-father" (2.2.376) aside, Hamlet offers a unique perspective on what he sees as the cause of his own melancholy, citing a

lack of liberty as a contributing factor. Today, human rights activists count liberty as one of humanity's inalienable rights, and integral aspect of human nature. Four hundred years ago, Burton describes this kind of liberty as "a power to live according to [our] own laws, as we will ourselves" (i.76). Hamlet, although Prince of Denmark, lacks this basic human right to do as he himself wills: he cannot return to school, he cannot consort with Ophelia, and he is being spied on by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet believes that "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me [Denmark] is a prison" (2.2.250-2). Imprisoned in Elsinore, he is bounded by earth and surrounded by water, which as I have noted is a cure for a cold and dry melancholy. However, Hamlet is not at liberty to partake of the curative qualities of water since Claudius refuses to allow him to leave Denmark to return to school. In addition to physical imprisonment, Hamlet's mind is also being held captive by his ever-increasing melancholy, which is effectively causing his inability to act on his father's demand for revenge. Hamlet employs a natural image to express his feelings of imprisonment to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams" (2.2.248-250). The natural image of the nutshell, here, shows the potential of the human mind to escape the limits imposed by nature or even imprisonment and the perspective affecting Hamlet's melancholy that does not allow him the liberty to "count himself king of infinite space." In a vicious cycle, his lack of liberty in Denmark contributes to his humoral imbalance, while his melancholy thinking also contributes to his feeling trapped in a prison. Claudius refuses to let Hamlet go back to school, while at the same time giving Laertes the liberty to do just that, presumably because Claudius needs to keep an eye on Hamlet in his current distempered state. According to Burton, going back to school probably would not have helped Hamlet, since overmuch study is also a chief cause of melancholy. One of Hamlet's

friends from school, Rosencrantz, when trying to ascertain the cause of Hamlet's melancholy, tells Hamlet, "You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend" (3.2.335-7). Rosencrantz believes that if Hamlet can talk about what is bothering him, release his troubles into the air, then he would be free from his inner turmoil. Hamlet, suffering from what Burton called "*cordolium* [heart sorrow]" (i.390) declares, "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.159). The very thing that Rosencrantz thinks will help him is that which Hamlet cannot do because of the restrictions Claudius has placed on his liberty and also, perhaps, because Hamlet realizes that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are spies and he does not want to disclose the truth for fear it will be reported to Claudius and further restrictions on his liberty be placed upon him.

The issue of liberty goes deeper than just not being able to go back to school and not being able to express his true feelings, and it extends to more than one plot by Claudius, who sees Hamlet's liberty as "full of threats" (4.1.4). These plots culminate in Claudius' effort to take away all Hamlet's liberty by having him murdered, cutting short his natural life. Interestingly, Claudius' plan for Hamlet's assassination involves sending Hamlet to sea, where he is taken captive by pirates. Hamlet, in this trip to sea, is at last immersed in water, the traditional cure for cold and dry melancholy. While Jaques refused this cure, Hamlet embraces it, since when he returns to Denmark, he seems more resolved to act on his father's demand for revenge. Burton describes a situation where we "see a lamb executed, a wolf pronounce sentence, a *latro* [a robber] arraigned, and *fur* [a thief] sit on the bench" (i.63). In this natural metaphor, Hamlet can be seen as the lamb in the play, Claudius the wolf, robber and thief who attempts to have the lamb executed. The person determining Hamlet's liberty or lack thereof,

then, stands as one whose liberty should be checked since he is himself a murderer. The motivations behind that murder lie at the heart of another cause of Hamlet's melancholy.

Hamlet further concurs with Burton in naming dishonesty, the concealing of one's true nature and thus disconnecting from one's surroundings, as one of the roots of his melancholy humor. Burton's description of madness caused by people who are admired "not as they are but as they seem to be" (i.65) recalls Hamlet's argument in Act 1, Scene 2, with Gertrude over the nature of seeming which I will discuss below. Similarly, in Hamlet's famed "Get thee to a nunnery!" speech, he makes mention of women putting on false faces or wearing make-up. Concerning this duplicity, he says, "Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad" (3.1.148-9). The "it" there is a somewhat ambiguous referent—"it" could indicate the duplicity inherent in human nature that has made him mad. He certainly finds himself surrounded by duplicity, people who act "not as they are but as they seem to be." Ophelia lies to Hamlet as a pawn to her father's will; Polonius spies on Laertes, Hamlet, Ophelia, and Gertrude; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern thinly veil their covert mission; and Claudius plots King Hamlet's death and, subsequently, Prince Hamlet's death. Those around Hamlet, then, are characterized by what Burton describes as "shifting, lying, cogging, plotting, counterplotting" (i.65). As such, the cause of Hamlet's humoral imbalance might be that he has succumbed to the frailty of his own human nature and been forced to put on a false face himself, fighting others' duplicity with duplicity of his own.

Hamlet's acting skills give ample reason to doubt the extent and nature of his madness. Before he sees the ghost, before his plan to clothe himself with an "antic disposition" to hide the nature of his true intentions, Hamlet confesses to the kind of melancholy "within which passes show" (1.2.85-86), setting the stage for a theatrical motif that persists throughout the play. This

emphasis on acting and theatre, again, leads one to believe that Hamlet's madness might not be genuine but feigned. Before he begins his ranting, he tells Marcellus and Horatio that he will "put an antic disposition on" (1.5.181), as one would put on a costume or put on a persona in a play. Continuing with this metaphor, Claudius wonders during the middle of the play "why Hamlet puts on this confusion" (3.1.2). Hamlet himself was a well-versed actor, able to compose a play to "catch the conscience of the king" (2.2.606) and mete out to the actors over forty lines of detailed instructions concerning the production of that play. Concerning madness and folly, Burton also uses the stage as a metaphor, suggesting that we all "play the fools still *nec dum finites Orestes* [and the play is not yet finished]" (i.53). Acting and theatrics, then, pervade *Hamlet* from beginning to end. In the source text, Belleforest's "The Hystorie of Hamblet, Prince of Denmark," the title character on which Hamlet was based, was not melancholy at all but rather acts mad to avoid the tyranny of his uncle and plot revenge for his father's death. Hamlet, who reveals intimate knowledge of the theatre in his interactions with the players, is himself plagued by an inability to act on his father's demand for revenge at the same time that he "acts" mad. The acting in *Hamlet* is not just limited, however, to Hamlet and his namesake from Shakespeare's source text. Claudius spends most of the play acting as if he didn't kill King Hamlet. Ophelia acts out her father's wishes in an attempt to discover the cause of Hamlet's melancholy. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern act as spies and couriers at the King and Queen's behest. The troupe of professional actors, who appear midway through the play, are acting on command. And, finally, on a meta-fictional level, when the play *Hamlet* is performed on stage, all of the characters are played by actors. The pervasiveness of acting in *Hamlet* further echoes Shakespeare's assertion in *As You Like It* "that all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players" (2.7.138-139) and leads one to conclude that acting is an integral part of human

nature something that connects all humans to one another. In *Hamlet*, though, acting seems to move beyond this and ascends to the height of divination and becomes an active force of nature unto itself.

The introduction of Prince Hamlet in Act 1, Scene 2, highlights the difference between acting melancholy, simply wearing an “inky cloak” (1.2.77) or “customary suits of solemn black” (1.2.78), and genuinely being melancholy. Early in the scene, Gertrude asks Hamlet, “Why seems it so particular with thee” (1.2.75). The verb “seem” is an important word that here implies that “it,” melancholy, might not be genuine but rather a show. In fact, according to the OED, one of the definitions of “seem” in use in 1603, and still in use today, was “to have a semblance or appearance,” suggesting a concealment of what lies beneath the surface. A great deal of acting or seeming occurs within the play, but Hamlet insists that his melancholy is not an act. Gertrude’s intimations infuriate Hamlet, and he lists the “moods, forms, shapes of grief” that “indeed seem for they are actions that a man may play” (1.2.82-84). Hamlet thus equates “seeming” explicitly with acting, playing a part, something that in this case he vehemently denies doing. With the statement, “Seems madam? Nay it is” (1.2.76), Hamlet distinguishes between the artifice, a seeming used to hide one’s true nature, and his sincere and natural grief for his father. Hamlet’s further assertion that he “ha[s] within [him] that which passes show” (1.2.85) not only confirms the authenticity of his emotions but also condemns what he sees around him as “the trappings of woe” (1.2.86). Even this early in the play, Hamlet’s “prophetic soul” (1.5.42) suspects that the mourning of the King and Queen is more acting than genuine emotion. The King and Queen seem to mourn the death of the King but their “o’er hasty marriage” belies this seeming. Hamlet will soon decide to use acting to determine the nature of his mother and uncle’s artifice.

In his decision in Act 1, Scene 5, to put an antic disposition on, Hamlet employs acting to divine the nature of the men around him. Like Hamlet in Belleforest who uses acting to escape his tyrannical uncle, Hamlet also uses acting as a tool. He acts mad to divine the true nature of what is “rotten in the state of Denmark” (1.5.90). The sin that elicits this natural image of decay in the state will eventually lead to more death and carrion for Fortinbras to discover at the end of the play. But, in the meantime, Hamlet uses madness as he sees fit, wearing it as a mantle, which he believes that he can doff and don at will. This is clearly evident in a later scene when Hamlet’s conversation with Polonius is compared to his interactions with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. When he sees Polonius, he acts as if he doesn’t recognize him and labels him a “fishmonger” (2.2.175). Later in this exchange, he says to Polonius, who is much older than Hamlet, that he “should grow as old as [Hamlet is], if like a crab [he] could walk backward” (2.2.203-204). In stark contrast, not 20 lines later, when Hamlet sees Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he recognizes them immediately as his “excellent good friends” (2.2.225) and converses quite lucidly. He exhibits a goodly amount of self-awareness when he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he is “but mad north-northwest” (2.2.378). When the wind is southerly “[he] know[s] a hawk from a handsaw” (2.2.379). As Paster points out, the direction associated with melancholy is north, so Hamlet here says that when he is acting as if he is in a manic stage of melancholy (when the wind is blowing from the north), he acts mad, but in his more sober moments when the wind is southerly, he has a firm grasp on reality. When conditions are right, then he can employ complete control of his mental faculties. In one such sober moment, he shows a tight grasp on reality when, after asking whether Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were sent for, Hamlet says “there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to color” (2.2.280-281). Hamlet here clearly understands what

is going on around him mere lines after appearing as if he has lost touch with reality in his conversation with Polonius, wherein Polonius aptly observes, “Though this be madness, yet there is method in it” (2.2.205). Hamlet’s “method” is systematically to choose when he acts mad, with the intended result being to discern the natures of those around him and the truth of what happened to his father.

Hamlet’s interactions with the players further reveal the power of acting. To this point, in Act 2, Scene 2, when the troupe of players enters, Hamlet has been acting mad but has not yet put into action his father’s demand for revenge. The player’s soliloquy, wherein he weeps for Hecuba, reveals Hamlet’s inaction in stark relief. Hamlet has all the natural impetus, “prompted to [his] revenge by Heaven and Hell” (2.2.585), and yet he “must like a whore unpack his heart with words” (2.2.586) rather than action. The speech by the player, thus, causes Hamlet to question his inability to act thus far. The player has none of Hamlet’s motivations—What is Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba? (2.2.536)—and yet the player is able to act as if he is genuinely heartbroken. Hamlet, whose heart is actually broken by the death of his father, is moved to outrage at himself and his inaction by the power of the player’s acted emotion for Hecuba. Hamlet, further, describes it as “monstrous that this player here/But in a fiction, in a dream of passion/Could force his soul to his own conceit” (2.2.552-554). Monstrous is, by very definition, unnatural, so he here raises the question of whether this kind of acting is even natural at all. Is it monstrous that Hamlet has not been able to act thus far? Or, if by becoming a murderer, even with a good cause, will he bemonster himself? Whether natural or unnatural, the player’s actions spur Hamlet to his own action, for it is in this scene that Hamlet devises the plan to use a play as a more direct method to divine the true nature of the King.

In Act 3, Scene 2, Shakespeare illustrates how a play can be used to actively divine the nature of a man. Hamlet instructs the players to incorporate a scene into *The Murder of Gonzago* similar to the scene of King Hamlet's murder, described to Prince Hamlet by his father's ghost, with the hope that Claudius' reaction to this scene will incriminate him. Hamlet receives the details of the murder from the ghost, "incorporal air" (3.4.109); air is the element associated with blood and action, which is fitting since King Hamlet's recitation of these events is a call to action for Prince Hamlet. The king's murder, as described by the ghost, occurred in a natural, edenic setting, the palace garden, while the king was resting in a natural state of repose. Shakespeare uses the word "unnatural" (1.5.26, 1.5.29) twice in four lines to highlight the monstrous nature of the Cain-like fratricide committed upon the king by his brother, Claudius, in that natural setting. Since the "serpent that did sting [Hamlet's] father's life/now wears his crown" (1.5.40-41), this murderous act brings something altogether unnatural and rotten to the state (the king) of Denmark. By playing out this most unnatural act on the stage before Claudius, Hamlet hopes to elicit a response that reveals to him the true nature of his "uncle-father" (2.2.376).

Hamlet notes "that guilty creatures sitting at a play/have by the very cunning of the scene/been struck to the soul that presently/they have proclaimed their malefactions" (2.2.590-593). Shakespeare, through Hamlet, here suggests that one of the functions of a play, then, is to divine the nature of those watching. In fact, as Hamlet tells the players, acting "holds as twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image" (3.2.22-23). A play, then, shows the viewer his true self in a way that makes the viewer scrutinize his nature. As Egan succinctly states, "the concern is with the power of dramatic representation (a falsehood) to elicit from the guilty their unwilling but terrified confession (a truth)" (143). In the same way that acting played an active role in reminding Hamlet of his inability to act, here acting is actively

used to draw out the true nature of Claudius. To this point, Hamlet has only suspected Claudius of murder but determines that “The play’s the thing/wherein [he’ll] catch the conscience of a King” (2.2.605-606). *The Mousetrap*, although it does not cause Claudius to confess, serves its function, since Claudius stops the play short calling for the lights and becoming “marvelous distempered” (3.2.299-300), bolstering Hamlet’s belief in his guilt. Furthermore, the King’s reaction to the murder of Gonzago convinces Hamlet that his uncle truly did murder his father, and this knowledge, divined from a play, sends Hamlet into direct action.

The result of *The Murder of Gonzago* can be explained in humoral and thus ecocritical terms as well as terms of action. The play not only divines the nature of Claudius, but it also affects the humoral balance of those watching it. According to Paster, the play “captur[es] the aggressive potential of dramatic fictions to change the minds *and bodies* of their onlookers” (52, emphasis added), and as such, *The Murder of Gonzago* not only affects the minds of those watching it, it also affects their bodies as well, in a mutually symbiotic humoral fashion. On this note, Paster engages in a lengthy discussion of the humoral aftermath of *The Murder of Gonzago*, centering on Hamlet’s desire to “drink blood” (3.3.388-392). She views “Hamlet’s declaration [of wanting to drink blood] as the psychophysiological expression of a new mood and interest, a material change in consciousness brought about temporarily by [among other things] the provocative images of the play and Claudius’s vehement reaction to it” (57). She further “interpret[s] this new appetite as a sign of release from melancholic depression, the burgeoning of a desire to be ready physiologically and psychologically for an outburst of rage..., the burgeoning of a longing for cure” (58). Hamlet’s desire to drink blood, a hot moist humor to counteract his cold, dry melancholy, shows him ready for a cure. This separates Hamlet from Jaques in *As You Like It*, who refuses the stag’s tear as a cure for his melancholy, and thus

initiates the tragic death and destruction that ensues from Hamlet's decision to act out his father's revenge.

Through the first half of the play, though, before he gains the ability to act on his revenge, Hamlet's melancholy manifests itself in his fixation on the act of suicide or self-slaughter, the ultimate disconnect between man and the natural. Michael MacDonald, in his study of the early modern cultural views of suicide in England, notes "[t]hat melancholy was frequently the prelude to suicidal thoughts was commonplace" (MacDonald 102). Burton describes those suffering from melancholy as "weary of their lives" (i.414), echoing Hamlet's lament in his first soliloquy: "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable/ seem to me all the uses of this world" (1.2.133-134). From a humoral perspective, since Saturn was the planet most closely allied with melancholy, Gellert notes that "[s]uicide... was the particular province of Saturn, as well as the special preoccupation of melancholics" (Gellert 64). From an ecological perspective, though, self-preservation, as a rule, defines human nature, and so suicide is a biologically unnatural impulse. In psychological terms, however, it would seem almost natural that wracked with the kind of emotional stress that Hamlet must endure, one would want to end the suffering. This idea is further complicated, though, since, as Paster reminds us, the physical (biological) and psychological aspects of man are completely intertwined.

Hamlet's first soliloquy wherein he ruminates on suicide is rife with natural as well as humoral images. He begins the soliloquy with an exclamation:

Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! (1.2.129-132)

A longstanding controversy exists concerning whether Hamlet's flesh is "sullied," "sallied" or "solid," and, as the editors of the Norton Shakespeare note, the "Q2 has 'sallied' as a possible spelling of sullied. Editors have seen word play on 'sallied' or salty, tear-soaked...and 'sullied' or contaminated and ill-used. 'Solid' accords best with melt" (Norton 1675, n.9). I concur with the idea that "'solid' accords best," since "solid" makes the most sense given the humoral tone of the rest of the sentence in which the word appears. Melancholy is cold, dry and thick, and, as noted, associated with procrastination and inaction. Hamlet, here, desires that his temperament would "thaw" or warm up, and "dew" would make his temperament moist. Both of these are characteristics of a sanguine temperament, which is associated with action. This humoral cure of warm and moist to counteract his cold, dry melancholy would make it possible for him to "resolve" to do something, since the sanguine temperament would be more prone to hot-blooded action. His alternative to this wish for a cure for melancholy and a call to action involves "self-slaughter" the final result for some afflicted with a melancholic temperament. Hamlet, here, sincerely wishes for the ability to act or the ability to kill himself, but, at this point, does neither. Hamlet's melancholy, which, as MacDonald states, was often accompanied by suicidal thoughts, results partially from his mother's "o'er hasty marriage," and we learn in this soliloquy that the marriage disturbs Hamlet. He describes the situation in natural (and culturally loaded) terms, saying "Tis an unweeded garden/That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it" (1.2.135-137). Eric Partridge, in an exhaustive look at the bawdy references in Shakespeare's work, notes that, in Elizabethan England, "thing" was slang for "penis" (259) and that gardening metaphors were often used to signify sexuality (44). Thus, the "unweeded garden" could signify Gertrude's unchecked sexuality, while "grows to seed" suggests the sexual nature of her relationship with Claudius's "thing." Further, Claudius "possess [es]" Gertrude's sexuality, and

Hamlet finds these “incestuous sheets” (1.2.157) to be “rank and gross in nature,” an abomination that goes against everything natural.

Hamlet contemplates suicide again in his most famous soliloquy, which begins with the topic for the ensuing debate: “To be or not to be” (3.1.57). The image of sleep, a natural state of repose, appears frequently in Hamlet’s contemplation, as he equates sleep with death, which resembles sleep. He asserts that “by sleep...we end/the heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to” (3.1.64-65). To sleep forever, then, would end the “natural shocks” as well as the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” that can plague a person. Death, though it looks like sleep, obviously is not. Ecologically speaking, one does not sleep in death but rather decays and returns to the earth, significantly in humoral and ecological terms, the element most closely associated with melancholy. Hamlet muses beyond the natural, and with the thought “For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come” (3.1.68), stumbles upon something beyond nature in the contemplation of suicide. Burton reminds us that “[melancholic people] are afraid of death, yet weary of their lives” (i.414). What if death is not the end—what if something exists beyond the natural world? Death is something altogether natural, a forever sleep that returns one to the earth, but the thought of what comes after death is frightening, and, according to Hamlet, “makes cowards of us all” (3.1.85), staying a suicidal hand.

Thoughts on suicide in early modern England, like Hamlet’s contemplation, move beyond the physiological and into the supernatural realm. According to Michael Dalton, suicide was considered “an offense against God, against the king, and against Nature” (qtd. in MacDonald 15), and these issues would have been in the forefront of the minds of the Elizabethan audience listening to Hamlet ponder suicide. As MacDonald surmises, “The fear of divine punishment overwhelms the famous question that begins his soliloquy on melancholy”

(94). As Hamlet intimates in his first soliloquy, God has “set his canon against self-slaughter,” and as such suicide was seen as a “desperate sin in the eyes of the church” (MacDonald 15). Those suspected of suicide were sent, posthumously, before a coroner’s jury. The jury could either find the suspected suicidal person “*felo de se*, a felon of himself” or “*non compos mentis*—not of sound mind” (MacDonald 16). Those found guilty of *felo de se* suicide (and their families) were subject to harsh religious, civil and criminal censure. Since suicide was seen as an “offense against God,” there were subsequent religious sanctions concerning the burial of a person found guilty of *felo de se* suicide, including truncated burial rites and burial in profane ground. The priest at Ophelia’s funeral, who claimed they “should profane the service of the dead/To sing sage requiem and such rest to her/As to peace-parted souls” (5.1.219-221), would likely concur with Burton who declares of suicide, “so foul a fact were accordingly censured to be infamously buried” (i.439). The person found guilty of *felo de se* suicide, then, would be returned to the element most closely associated with melancholy, earth, to rot in profane earth without the blessing of the church.

Since the punishment for suicide was divine in nature, it should not be a shock that the early modern Elizabethans thought that suicide could have a supernatural impetus. Supernatural and natural causes for suicide, though, were not mutually exclusive. According to MacDonald, “it was widely believed that Satan could influence people’s minds by natural or supernatural means,” and further, “[m]elancholy and diabolical temptation were not...incompatible explanations for suicide” (104). Burton maintains that “the devil sets in a foot, strangely deludes them, and by means makes them to overthrow the temperature of their bodies and hazard their souls” (Burton iii 343). Belleforest warns of the “danger of being abused by the devil” that

melancholic's faced. Through Hamlet's voice, Shakespeare makes explicit reference to this idea of "being abused by the devil" when Hamlet, thinking about his encounter with the ghost, says

the spirit I have seen
May be the devil, ...
...and perhaps,
Out of my weakness and my melancholy...
Abuses me to damn me (Shakespeare 2.2.599-604).

Upon the ghost's beckoning Hamlet to follow him, Horatio warns of how the devil might abuse Hamlet:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord
...
And there assume some horrible form
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness (1.4.69-74)

In the very next scene, Hamlet tells Horatio and company that he has decided to "put an antic disposition on," so the Elizabethan (and modern) audiences would have cause to wonder whether the devil had preyed upon Hamlet's melancholic soul.

In the final scene, Hamlet experiences misgivings, or rather "gaingiving" (5.2.213) about dueling with Laertes. But after his lengthy melancholic contemplation of death and suicide, Hamlet seems ready to face it. Earlier in the play, when contemplating suicide, Hamlet mused, "To be, or not to be." This "be" is an active verb—the question is, "To live, or not to live." Hamlet decides that the fear of "what dreams may come" and divine retribution "makes us rather bear those ills we have/than fly to others that we know not of" (3.1.82-3). Man does not know

what will come after death, so it is better to bear the fardels here. By the final scene, Hamlet has come to realize, “the readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is’t to leave betimes?” (5.2.221-2). He now believes not that man knows nothing of the nature of the afterlife, but rather that man knows nothing of what he leaves. Hamlet, perhaps, has come to this conclusion because of duplicity inherent in human nature. Nothing was as it seemed, with all the “shifting, lying, cogging, plotting, counterplotting” (Burton i.65). Even Hamlet himself was not what he seemed, having put on madness to try to ascertain the duplicity of those around him. Instead of “To be or not to be” with its implied action of living or ending it all, Hamlet is now resigned to fate with the passive pronouncement, “Let it be.” (5.2.222)

CONCLUSION

An ecocritical look at melancholy in early modern drama need not stop with simply the male characters in Shakespeare's plays. My discussion thus far has been concerned with men, Jaques and Hamlet, and as Neely notes, works like "Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, with its all-male frontispiece, solidif[y] the association of melancholy, an ailment increasingly viewed as mental, with upper-class men" (789). However, melancholy is not a gender specific disease although, interestingly, melancholy is in fact associated with women, since women were thought to be cold and dry, the temperature and level of moisture associated with melancholy. Females affected by melancholy, it should come as no surprise, abound in Shakespeare's work.

Women's melancholy in the comedies is generally of the mild sort. Rosalind begins *As You Like It* as a melancholy virgin, saddened by the loss of her father. One of her first lines in the play, directed toward Celia indicates the cause and extent of her melancholy: "Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure" (1.2.3-5). Since *As You Like It* is a comedy, which Russ MacDonald notes usually ends with marriage or a union, the close of the play leaves Rosalind in a more sanguine humor with her marriage to Orlando, the orchestration of several other marriages in fine comic fashion, and a reunion with her banished father. In another comedy, *Twelfth Night*, both Olivia and Viola spend a significant amount of the play suffering from melancholy as the result of loss of a family member, Olivia's father and brother as well as Viola's twin brother. Olivia begins the play wearing the trappings of woe and eschewing courtship, while Viola must hide not only her grief at the loss of her brother, but also her love melancholy resulting from

hiding her love for Orsino. As is the case with *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* ends with the two women in a much more sanguine humor as Viola's brother is restored and she is able to declare her love for and marry Orsino, while Olivia, though her brother and father remain dead, finds a union with Sebastian, Viola's restored brother. Both participate in the comic ending of marriage.

In much the same way that Hamlet's melancholy is more tragic than Jaques's, so do the women with melancholy in tragedies suffer more than the women in comedies and illustrate how women "wear [their] rue with a difference" (4.5.182). As Hamlet's humoral imbalance was linked to madness, so are Ophelia's troubles a greater degree of melancholy. Within *Hamlet*, Ophelia suffers from a more severe form of melancholy, which leads to hysteria, a pathology almost exclusively reserved for women, that comes from the same root as "hysterectomy," and "was originally thought to be due to a disturbance of the uterus" (OED "hysteria"). Neely refers to the disease as a "wandering womb" (320), which results from a humoral imbalance characterized by the "retention of menstrual blood" (320). Ophelia's hysteria ends with her suicide by drowning in a stream. While water is thought to be a cure for melancholy, which worked for Hamlet and which Jaques refused, water becomes a means by which Ophelia finally succumbs to her madness. Suicide, in fact, is a common theme for melancholic women in Shakespeare's tragedies. Separated from her husband when he leaves for the battlefield, Lady Macbeth is driven to hysteria and suicide by her murderous deeds, and her instrumental role in interfering with the divine right of kings by plotting the murder of King Duncan. Her most memorable line "Out, damned spot" (5.1.30) refers to a spot of blood which was associated humorally with a hot temper, the initial temperature that set her on the path to madness. The

Doctor pronounces, in Lady Macbeth's case, that "unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles" (5.1.71-72), linking Lady Macbeth's crime and punishment to the natural world.

Interestingly, in all of these cases of female melancholy and madness, the women become humorally imbalanced at the loss of a man in their lives. Rosalind has lost her father; Olivia, her father and brother; Viola, her brother; Ophelia, her father and lover; and Lady Macbeth, her husband. The resolution, in the comedies, comes when the women are reunited with the men they lost or married to another man. In the tragedies, the women become separated from the men they cherished in the beginning of the play. Significantly, in none of these cases does a female lose a sister. In the patriarchal society of early modern England, it was considered natural and socially mandated that a woman was the property of her father until she was married and became the property of her husband, so the idea that a woman would be thrown into a humoral imbalance by the absence of a male in her life has ecological, psychological, as well as feminist implications. As Estok maintains, "an activist criticism raises environmental awareness, [and] connects with other more established activist theories" (88), and one such established activist theory he refers to is feminism. An exploration of the women mentioned and other female melancholic characters within Shakespeare's plays would offer a different perspective on the nature of melancholy and the way that these women position themselves in relation to the natural world. In this way, one could not only raise awareness about nature, but women's issues as well.

In light of my discussion of the ecological implications of the melancholy experienced by Jaques, Hamlet and the women in Shakespeare's plays, consider again the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment definition of ecocriticism, that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii). Not only, however, does ecocriticism show us the connection between literature and nature, the

relationship between literature and nature reveals further relationships between the mind, body and the natural world, the complex nature of the relationship between humans and the natural world, and present-day man's relationship to ideologies of past generations. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare explores Jaques's relationship to the natural world in his connection to the weeping stag and to the trees and in his pontification on the nature of aging. Jaques's melancholic disposition is further linked to the natural world in that it was a result of an imbalance of the humors and could be cured by something as natural as a weeping stag's tear. Hamlet, who eventually takes the cure that Jaques eschewed, is connected to melancholy through his associations with the earth and his contemplation of worms. His further contemplation on suicide shows a connectivity in the Elizabethan mind between the natural and supernatural world. Since, as Jaques says in his seven ages of man speech, acting is a natural part of life, the process of acting, while it alienates Hamlet from those around him, does connect humans to one another in the way we interact. The theme of melancholy and humors in Shakespeare's work, then, reveals the vast interconnectivity of the mind, body and the natural world.

An ecocritical look at melancholy shows a blurring of the line between humanity and the natural world: in humoral theory, we are all connected. The theory shows how the mind and the natural world are inextricably linked, existing in a symbiotic relationship. A person's actions affect nature and nature affects a person, even in the deepest psychological sense. By raising awareness about not only the environmental issues at play in *As You Like It* but also the way in which a psychological condition is dramatized as being a result of a complex interaction of bodily humors in *Hamlet*, we see that in our current anthropocentric world, we come from a rich history of discourse that maintains that our bodies and minds are dependent on, affect and are affected by the natural world.

Ecocriticism, a relatively new form of criticism, is still defining itself. As I noted, Estok and Egan disagree about what makes criticism ecocriticism. Estok argues for a political agenda in ecocriticism and Egan believes politics should be left to the activists and one should use the eco-activist mindset to employ ecocriticism to focus on literature rather than politics. I believe I have shown that you can do effective ecocriticism both ways. It can be overtly political, as my argument about Jaques's example of a nascent animal rights activism or the feminist argument one could make concerning the women who experience melancholy. Ecocriticism, always inherently political, can wear its "rue" differently by making an implicit ecological statement as I do in my discussion of Hamlet's melancholy, which as I have noted is a result of humors associated with the natural world. Whether overtly or implicitly political, both the discussion of Jaques and Hamlet and any future discussion of the female characters suffering from melancholy raise awareness about the interconnectivity of man and nature and mind and body, effectively erasing these dichotomies and showing that in this Gaia of earth, we are all connected.

Works Cited

- Babb, Lawrence. "Hamlet, Melancholy and the Devil." *Modern Language Notes*. 59.2 (1944): 120-122. Print.
- . *Elizabethan Malady*. Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951.
- Bennett, Robert B. "The Reform of the Malcontent: Jaques and the Meaning of *As You Like It*." *Shakespearean Studies*. (1976): 183-204. Reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*. Eds. Dana Ramel Barnes and Marie Lazzari. Vol. 34. Detroit: Gale Research, 1997. Print.
- Bradford, Alan Taylor. "Jaques' Distortion of the Seven-Ages Paradigm." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 27 (1976): 171-176. Print.
- Branch, Michael P. and Scott Slovic. *The ISLE Reader*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003. Print.
- Burton, Robert. *Anatomy of Melancholy*. 1621. New York: New York Review Books, 2001. Print.
- Draper, John W. *The Humors and Shakespeare's Characters*. New York: AMS Press, 1965. Print.
- Egan, Gabriel. *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Estok, Simon C. "Doing Ecocriticism with Shakespeare." *Early Modern Ecostudies*. Eds. Karen Raber et al. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. 77-92. Print.
- Fendt, Gene. "Resolution, Catharsis, Culture: *As You Like It*." *Philosophy and Literature*. 19 (1995): 248-260. Print.
- Gellert, Bridget. "The Iconography of Melancholy in the Graveyard Scene of *Hamlet*." *Studies in Philology*. 67.1 (1970): 57-66. Print.

- Glotfelty, Cheryll. "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996. xv-xxxvii. Print.
- Heffernan, Carol Falvo. *The Melancholy Muse: Chaucer, Shakespeare and Early Medicine*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1995. Print.
- Jonson, Ben. "To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare." *The Norton Anthology: English Literature*. 8th ed. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006. 648-50. Print.
- MacDonald, Michael and Terrence R. Murphy. *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. Print.
- McDonald, Russ. *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996. Print.
- Milton, John. "L'Allegro." *The Norton Anthology: English Literature*. 8th ed. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006. 697-701. Print.
- Neely, Carol Thomas. "Documents in Madness: Gender in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Early Modern Culture." *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 42.3 (1991): 315-338. Print.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Print.
- Partridge, Eric. *Shakespeare's Bawdy*. London: Routledge, 1968. Print.
- Paster, Gail Kern. *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Print.
- Raber, Karen and Thomas Hallock. "Introduction: Early Modern Ecostudies." *Early Modern Ecostudies*. Eds. Karen Raber et al. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. 1-10. Print.

- Simon, Bennett. "Hamlet and the Trauma Doctors: An Essay At Interpretation." *American Imago*. 58.3 (2001): 707-722. Print
- Shakespeare, William. *Antony and Cleopatra*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: Norton, 1997. 2619-2708. Print.
- *As You Like It*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: Norton, 1997. 1591-1658. Print
- *Hamlet*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: Norton, 1997. 1659-1759. Print.
- *Macbeth*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: Norton, 1997. 2555-2618. Print.
- Stabler, A. P. "Melancholy Ambition and Revenge in Belleforest's Hamlet." *PMLA*. 81. (1966): 207-213. Print.
- Thron, E. Michael. "Jaques: Emblems and Morals." *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 30 (1979): 84-89. Print.
- Walkington, Thomas. *The Optic Glasse*. London, 1639. Print.
- White, Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996. 3-14. Print.

VITA

Angela Brown was born and raised in Heiberger, Alabama and received her B.A. from the University of West Alabama. She presented *Spleen in the Green World: Jaques, Melancholy, and Nature in As You Like It* at *Reading the Book of Nature: Conference on Religion, Literature and the Arts* held at the University of Iowa in April of 2009. She also presented "All forms, moods, shapes of grief: An Ecocritical Perspective on Hamlet's Melancholy" at *Arkansas Conference on Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition* held at Henderson State University in November of 2009.