Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory. Gabriel Egan.
Shakepeare and Theory. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015. viii + 200 pp. $29.95.

Arden's new series, Shakespeare and Theory, promises to give both students and scholars a thorough grounding in specific theoretical approaches that have been or are being brought to bear on Shakespeare's works. Gabriel Egan's entry in this series builds on his past work in *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (2006) to illustrate his claim that the Gaia hypothesis is "an essential component" (43) in any successful ecocriticism. Asserting that ecocritical theory "must be a presentist endeavor" and "must be scientific" (43), Egan offers readings that are oriented as much toward confirming the validity of Gaia theory as they are to providing a broad sense of what ecocriticism can do for Shakespeare studies.

Egan's introductory chapter offers a history of the theory's rise, and its present capacity to generate "refreshing, novel" interpretations of the plays (37); in turn, Shakespeare's work can provide a corrective to the distortions of Enlightenment thinking about ecological issues, given that "in certain ways . . . Shakespeare had a sounder grasp of what was really going on" (17). This is an unexceptional position, found in many recent early modern ecocritical self-justifications. Egan's account of ecocritical theory's origins and its applications to Shakespeare, however, is idiosyncratic and occasionally petty. For instance, Egan uses Val Plumwood as a representative of ecofeminist theory, yet concludes that her work is "shallow and distorted" for its insistence on breaking down the binaries, especially those involving gender, that undergird the logic that divides human beings from the nature they dominate and exploit. Ignoring Plumwood's peers, important writers from Caroline Merchant and Rosemary Reuther to Greta Gaard, Cate Mortimer-Sandilands, and Stacy Alaimo, Egan thus trivializes and dismisses ecofeminism altogether, moving quickly on to opportunities to judge individual Shakespeare critics.

Egan presumes to correct the limitations of Robert N. Watson's erudite and influential *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (2006); he attacks Simon Estok's *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (2011) for being so poor "it would attract little credit in an undergraduate essay" (31); and dismisses work by Jeffrey Theis for not really being ecocriticism. Dan Brayton's intelligent qualification of the way an obsession with the color green in ecological writing permits us to ignore the blue of oceans (*Shakespeare's Ocean: An Ecocritical Exploration* [2012)]) is framed with the irrelevant quibble that most ocean water is really green. Egan's sense of what counts and what does not count as ecocriticism on Shakespeare is inconsistent; some scholars who are primarily working with Milton are mentioned, while many working on Shakespeare are not (possibly because their writing has not appeared in the books Egan selects, but only in journal articles — it is hard to know what rubric governed these selections, but very few of the hundreds of essays in the field appear in the bibliography).

Whether this kind of analysis and summary is useful to scholars and students attempting to understand the sweep of critical history or the value of recent contributions to ecocriticism is debatable.

Egan's chapter on Shakespeare and the meaning of life argues that the plays challenge a strict notion of linear genetic inheritance by entertaining epigenetic influences, especially in the actions of environment (i.e., through the mother's experiences) on the developing fetus. This is evident in the late romances where so many children are born to suffering mothers or in terrifying conditions, resulting in complications for those children's identities. Egan gestures as well to a connection between Shakespeare's sense of authorial production as a kind of procreative activity, which resonates with and encourages a broader, environmentally sensitive version of reproduction. Likewise, his discussion of social networks oscillates between authorship, theater history, and the representational strategies in the plays that entangle biological and social systems. These chapters offer original angles on old subjects, and develop a more inclusive model of ecocritical theory's purview than many previous accounts have done. The chapter on animals, however, is underresearched and does not offer a particularly original set of observations or conclusions. For example, Egan discusses *Richard II*'s horses without referencing Watson's essay on horsemanship in the tetralogy (*English Literary Renaissance* 13.3 [1983]: 274–300); he analyzes Rowley's *Thomas Woodstock* without citing Kevin de Ornellas's work on it; and discusses Lance's dog Crab in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* without noting that Erica Fudge and Bruce Boehrer have a running argument about what the dog's presence means in that play. Perhaps mentioning these sources would be unnecessary if the arguments of this chapter were stronger, but they largely revisit the already much-debated problems of animals' unstable deployment as similes and analogies, and the porousness of the animal-human boundary.

In sum, Egan's volume is a missed opportunity, delivering a partial narrative about the present state of the field and constructing readings of limited value to scholars or students unfamiliar with its true scope.

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