

Elizabeth J. Bellamy. *Dire Straits: The Perils of Writing the Early Modern English Coastline from Leland to Milton*.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. ix + 204 pp. \$55. ISBN: 978-1-4426-4501-1.

Elizabeth Jane Bellamy's study of the status of English coastlines — fluvial, estuarine, and saltwater — in Renaissance English literature examines the ways in which cultural anxieties about the classical notion of the geographically marginal status of the British Isles register in early modern literary works. In the author's words, "this book argues that on those occasions when early modern English writers took their verse to the local water's edge, they did so in the fraught context of a longstanding cultural inheritance from antiquity" (3). Employing various figurative means of shouldering the burden of this inheritance, writers from Leland to Milton sought ways "to avoid unwitting entrapment within the shadow of *ultima Britannia*," the classical notion of Britain as a region at the margins of empire and the edge of the meaningful world. In twenty-eight chapters arranged into four sections, plus a coda, Bellamy details the ways in which fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English writers strove, in poetry and prose, to encode a poetics of coastlines that remained attentive to regional specificity. Bellamy builds explicitly on Richard Helgerson's influential study of spatial writing in the Tudor period, attending to chorographies, river poetry, and coastal descriptions in the works of writers as various as Lyly, Spenser, Ariosto, and Shakespeare, to mention only several. Bellamy's erudition, which encompasses classical and Continental as well as English literature, is on display throughout, and as an inquiry into the early modern literary preoccupation with staking out a national literature the book can be read as an extension of Helgerson's work.

Noteworthy new scholarship attends to the material significance of the world's oceans, seas, and coasts, as well as to their metaphorical dimensions, yet Bellamy makes no mention of the "blue humanities," as Steve Mentz has termed this growing body of work. Ecocritical early modernists, such as Mentz and the author of this review, have published numerous works on the early modern European imaginative engagement with the marine environment. While a work of popular history, Mark Kurlansky's microhistory of the Atlantic cod led the way for the blue humanities, and distinguished humanities scholars have followed suit. The historian Brian Fagan has examined the impact of what may have been the first transnational fish market, the medieval herring fishery, and the rise of the late medieval and early modern cod fishery on transoceanic voyages to the New World. The historian John R. Gillis has fruitfully examined the

role of coastlines in history and notes that new work in the blue humanities crosses disciplinary boundaries. The anthropologist and art historian John E. Mack has examined diverse cultural modes of imagining various bodies of salt water, including coastlines, from the ancient Phoenicians to modern Australia. Maritime historian W. Jeffrey Bolster, who helped pioneer the emergent subfield of marine environmental history, has argued on multiple occasions that the human impact on the marine environment has a much longer history than has generally been acknowledged. Claire Jowitt's recent study of piracy reconsiders the academic narrative of state-sanctioned and outlaw nautical plunder. Bellamy cites none of these studies.

In her readings of canonical and somewhat less canonical texts, Bellamy eschews the quagmires of emergent subfields of hybrid academic genealogy, such as marine environmental history. Yet some literary historians, such as Julie Sanders, whose discussion of Caroline "liquid landscapes" derives much of its freshness and cogency from an interdisciplinary engagement with cultural and historical geography, have fruitfully investigated the role of coastlines, shores, and riverbanks in shaping early modern cultural production. Such authors will be surprised by Bellamy's claim that "to date no one has studied the topic of early modern coastlines in their own right" (3). Bellamy's book does not cross disciplinary boundaries. Coastlines, it would seem, can still be read as a topos in literary history detached from the historicity and biophysical richness of the intertidal zone.

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