tered by amazing people like Desiderius Erasmus. And I often think of Eileen Joy as the Erasmus of today's humanities; her remarkable energy is an exemplar in these uncertain, exciting times. I also want to acknowledge students with whom I have shared many ideas, especially Nathan Kelber, Elizabeth Dieterich, Abdulhamit Arvas, Evan Lee, Michael Shumway, and Martin Goffeney. Special thanks to Sophia Schorr-Kon and Hatsuki Nishio for letting me use their photography. The readers at punctum books put much energy into my manuscript; their careful suggestions were extremely useful and encouraging. Also at punctum books, Kristen McCants and Vincent van Gerven Oei helped tremendously with getting the book into shape. My wife Shay and my sons Brenan and Carter were always there when I needed to walk away from the page. In their own way they made the uncertainty of the writing process livable while on sabbatical. Everyone listed here made this worth writing.

INTRODUCTION

This is the Thing

> You shall see, it will fall pat as I told you.
> — *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.184

Part scholarship, part journalism, part ecological screed, this book may read like an over-cooked batch of critical perspectives, a mashup of eco-criticism and close reading. Like other current investigations into the ecological significance of early modern literature, my account of *King Lear* draws on different and sometimes contrasting interpretive methods — cognitive science, evolutionary psychology, literary historicism, and what is called the new materialism. Moreover, I reflect on the broad global setting of eco-materialism's themes of catastrophe and enmeshed co-existence, using examples from Japan, New Mexico, Finland, India, all while jumping back to Shakespeare's early modern England. I also frame texts and genres in specific transcultural pairings: I ask that we think about Japanese tradition to understand European Renaissance pedagogy, and I make references to American pop culture — horror films and science fiction — to get at early modern drama's aesthetic effect.

No doubt the book wears this geographical and discursive motley because of the context of its making, being a product of an overseas sabbatical year in Tokyo. Reading Shakespeare's *King Lear* while sitting under three tiers of incessantly busy freeway overpasses in one of the world's most densely populated cities, in a sea of Roppongi neon and fifty-foot live-feed Sony ads, where Japan's techno-futurism sounds over the wave of urban commuters dressed in the weird nostalgia that defines Tokyo

fashion — sleek faux-50s-American business suits or the cosplay of Lolita teeny bop dyed hair — all while, a few miles to the north, the Fukushima nuclear power plant silently leaks radiation into the Pacific. Lotus eaters lost in the funhouse? Or survivors clinging to outmoded rituals in the face of madness? In this context, reading for the kernel of Shakespeare's philosophy of the human in his great tragedy can feel a bit unsettling, like that of a posthuman Rorschach test. (Or a bad acid trip flashback of a Rorschach test.) No excuse, I suppose, but in this setting the interpretation of cosmic decay and ecological catastrophe in Shakespeare's great tragedy does not feel necessarily forced. Only suspiciously apparent.

If my book seems to switch gears, then, or leave off in one direction and go in another, it is not just because it is the product of seemingly incoherent modes of intellectual inquiry. It is primarily because it comes out of the frenetic urban existence whose current prospects seem fraught with the euphoria of abundance and the specter of peril. When considering how these problems are identified and talked about differently in different academic circles, it is really difficult to imagine that one book can bring these discourses and their audiences together to work on the literary text coherently. Twisting a rope of sand, as the adage goes. Just at the level of audience, those interested in ecology might not be interested in the history of Renaissance literacy. And those interested in the scholarship on Shakespeare's *King Lear* might not be interested in accounts of tsunami stones or radioactive waste sites. But they should be. I think it is worth taking the risk of sounding incoherent or boorish or alarmist in the face of ecological catastrophe. It is not risking all that much when considering the stakes. I feel strongly that the new trend in early modern literature to study seriously the sciences, especially ecological sciences, and the new philosophical turn to eco-materialism, or scientific realism as it is sometimes called, is absolutely necessary and exceedingly important. It is not just because we are likely to produce new accounts of old texts — posthuman studies has been doing this for years now — but because

the proverbial clock is ticking. What Hamlet said about readiness? Well, it's happening. The sparrow has already fallen.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* does not, however, directly explore the first world urban experience. Rather, it gets at the deeper philosophical question of how we define human need in the context of a world where everything has been made to cater to the whims of a dying social system. The play offers a tantalizing account of humans at odds with the limits of their built environment. This is what I will call the posthuman parable of the narrative: during the course of the play the king learns that true need — defined in terms of love, charity, emotional recognition — is not something that can be ordered up like a plate of hasenpfeffer. Lear has this insight after struggling to resume his earlier status as sovereign subject, only to discover that at each turn he is becoming indistinguishable from those who live in the impoverished world outside his court. Lear learns that we need something that is in *excess* or outside of rational, calculable knowledge of our physical needs (here defined as food, housing, water). The tragedy not only stages the knotty issues of freeing ourselves from the logic of *homo economicus* — theories of production and consumption that are implicated in the enlightenment project of progress — but also in the way it imagines humans enmeshed as objects of a decaying world. In this way *King Lear* enacts the posthuman, reproducing in emblematic terms the critical impasse that evolves when trying to think beyond older categories that place human want and need in the context of class and status. Moreover, it urges us to think through the crucial gap in current critical thinking between old and new materialism, where the latter wants to eschew "constructionist" theories as somehow responsible for promoting the human experience as the only touchstone to value existence on our planet. This road of bracketing any and all old materialist theories is paved with good intentions, I'm sure. Lost in the fray of the debates between speculative realists and cultural materialists, however, is the acknowledgment that from the outset anti-humanism as a critical project always meant to de-center bourgeois (male) subjectivity as universal. The way the old ma-

terialism asserts its value to eco-criticism is to remind practitioners of the new object-oriented criticism that the Anthropocene just didn't happen, but evolved like a slow slouching beast over a long process of economic human activity best chronicled by materialist histories of urbanization and socialization. If eco-materialists work to rethink life in this wholly human-made geological era, it is best to think not of jettisoning the old theories that chart this process, but recycling its theories of causality and privileged terms of exchange and alienation.

Years ago, when I started teaching *King Lear,* I found it difficult to understand why the characters near the end of the play zone out and use a very different register to sound their words — zombie talk, I told my students — as if they were speaking to themselves out loud. They are not speaking through soliloquy *per se.* It is more like they are in shock. This makes sense, considering their circumstances. At first glance, it appears as if these characters — Lear, Edgar, Kent, and Gloucester — are reminding themselves of some adage about life's cruelty, seeking wisdom through the mode of speaking in the proverb. This comes to a head in the final words in the play, where Edgar leaves the audience hanging with the odd sing-songy lines, "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. / The oldest have borne most; we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long." Blogs and online student crib-note pages respond to these lines succinctly: "what's up with the ending of *King Lear*?" The scholarly response echoes this frustration in a different key, perhaps, by avoiding the basic question of meaning to ponder the difference between the quarto and folio.[1] I will argue in this book that Shakespeare is staging this practice of speaking proverbs — collecting and using adages — and showing us its therapeutic value as a form of collective speech in times of

1 Put simply, the 1608 printed quarto version features Albany saying these lines, while the 1623 folio assigns them to Edgar. It makes sense, to me, to see Hemings and Condell, the actors who may have played these characters, switching this to the "younger" of the two, given the content of the line. I will state here that all my references to *King Lear* are to the Oxford conflated text as it appears in *The Norton Shakespeare,* 2nd edn. (London: Norton, 2008).

stress. This relates to the posthuman debate in two ways. First, in the way it figures the human subject as a kind of receptacle or automaton who repeats a program written long ago in the "dark backward and abysm of time."[2] Second, in the way these adages are written to offer counsel and succor for future strife. I think that Shakespeare was thinking of this literacy when writing *King Lear.* It is clear he was thinking about it when writing some of his other tragedies, particularly *Hamlet.*

One scene in *Hamlet* comes to mind. It's a scene much noted by scholars working on memory studies. Polonius is saying goodbye to his son Laertes, who is leaving for Paris, and he gives him some parting wisdom in the form of what he calls "precepts." Here, put these to memory. "Character" them, he says. And thus begins a litany of stock maxims: "Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar" (1.3.81). *Et cetera.* In the Renaissance, this form of learning choice phrases from one's study, and collecting them in one's commonplace book, was a central part of education. It is a tradition that defined the very routine of reading and translating the past. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* foregrounds this literacy in different ways: Hamlet seems to be unlike Laertes in that his intellect appears entirely free from rote memory (the scene where he encounters his father's ghost is famous for Hamlet's use of the metaphor because he says he will tear all the pages out of his commonplace book in order to start fresh and just remember his father's murder). Later in the play, in the scene with Osric — the horribly awkward hanger-on of Claudius's court — Hamlet seems to make fun of people who have memorized words to help them through the strained conversations at court. One interesting metaphor is used by Hamlet to imagine the nature of this rote memory and its role in shaping one's intellect. It is used to describe Osric, so it's meant as a slur. Hamlet says:

> He did comply, sir, with his dug before he sucked it. Thus
> has he — and many more of the same bevy that I know the

2 The line is Prospero's from *The Tempest,* 1.2.50.

> drossy age dotes on — only got the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty collection, which carries them through and through the most fond and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out. (5.2.140–46)

The words memorized from many primers and handbooks used by courtiers and clerks for their "winnowed opinions" are pictured here as a kind of frothy mix, a "yeasty collection." It is tantalizing to think of this idea of yeast — an ecological metaphor having to do with early modern cooking and diet — as a contradictory image (I think it's about beer and not sourdough). As suggested in the figurative language, this form of reading and memorizing adages is formative, it "writes the individual subject," as we would say, in that the teachers of Latin and Greek during the time had no illusions about giving students freedom to explore and find themselves in free writing or expressive modes of communication, as we believe today. Students were asked to memorize everything. As my own Latin instructor used to say at the beginning of class, parodying the stodgy teacher from the television show *The Paper Chase,* "we learn Latin the old fashioned way, we memorize it." But this image of yeast suggests that Shakespeare saw something potentially self-generating about the rote practice of memorizing maxims and integrating them into our own conversation, a fixed set of words that grows and grows into something more than the sum of its parts. It's supposed to be a negative image. Light. Frothy. Insubstantial. "Blow them to their trials, the bubbles are out."

Not so fast. In the sixteenth century the housewife would make the day's beer by using yesterday's yeast. It was never, in a sense, "out." Yeast keeps reproducing. Yeast cells reproduce through binary fission, which means that their DNA simply reproduces exact copies of itself — machine like — *ad infinitum.* And quickly. Millions of cells a day. Buried in this metaphor of the yeasty collection is Shakespeare's divided response to his own education: Hamlet's quick wit and imagination, how his mind doesn't seem to be held down by any single train of thought,

rather it is made possible by a yeasty collection of adages, maxims, rhetorical gestures that are ingested in the imagination and then magically, endlessly, produce further rumination. Though Hamlet wants to put down Osric for being a twit with a fake personality, he nonetheless touches on the one aspect of humanist education that characterized its machine-like ability to churn out generations of "yeasty" wits, and playwrights whose work notably regenerated the writing of the past into some of the most dazzling literature in the English language.

King Lear is also reflecting on its educational origins, but in an entirely different key. If Hamlet's free-ranging mode of address can be described as an ebullient assessment of humanist training, *King Lear*'s staging of humanist learning is dour. The use of rhetoric in the play does not offer an image of regenerative nature. If anything, the picture of nature we get in *King Lear* is notoriously corrupted, "ruined," innately putrescent. And the two forms of "talking in script" are either coming from people who are masking their intentions and trying to deceive others, or from people who are going through their internal playbooks looking for a way to explain their bleak circumstances. I believe *King Lear* is one of the greatest experiments in humanist literacy, a wildly self-reflexive and profoundly probing work of art aimed at dislocating the power of state and church. When the dust settles, the characters are so alienated from their earlier faith as to be left only with the outer shell of its rituals, a forced pharisaical skepticism, where rote language is offered as a solution to the narrative's vision of social dissolution. If there is any hope offered in the view of rote memory in this play, it is not through an ecologically-minded figure of regeneration but in the image of characters using a form of affected speech whose familiar patterns and cadences offer a modicum of relief from the stress of their environment.

In Chapter One, "Listening to the Past; Or, How to Speak to the Future?" I frame the idea of rhetorical training and the use of adages in the context of our environmental crisis. I do this by showing how the collection of adages can be read as cautionary markers to be heeded by future readers. This is how Erasmus

meant his book of adages to serve his future readers. I then shift gears and turn to Shakespeare's general use of the adage. I show how his work offers two types of proverbs: embedded and citational. The former is closer to the textbook example of a writer using the deeper truth of the common saw in the background of a particular line or image. The latter is more a self-conscious use of the proverb, citing or "quoting" the lines, in the course of one's own language. In Chapter Two, "*Lear* and the Proverbial Reflex," I offer my own reading of proverbs in *Lear*. In the beginning of the play, characters use proverbs like Osric. They are advancing an agenda, proffering wisdom but really masking an inward intent. When the play follows Lear to the heath, the use of proverbs changes and we are presented with scenes where ecological stress and nature's decay are forcing characters to retreat to the adage to reflect on their well-being. In Chapter Three, "Accessorizing *King Lear* in the Anthropocene," I move to reading the play as a parable about prodigality, where the shift to proverbial language as warning and caution is in keeping with the play's move from the ostentatious court to the denuded heath. It is in this chapter where I bring together the two theoretical strains of my book on memory studies and posthuman theory, looking at the subtext of aristocratic eating habits and the enmeshed ecology these habits imply in the play's thinking about Lear's self-examination. In the Coda, "*Lear*'s Receding World," I consider the theoretical implications of recuperating unconscious forms of human behavior as liberatory. I end with a few notes about the challenge of reading early modern literary texts as reflections on an imperiled ecology and why we cannot give in to the fatalism suggested by the overwhelming apocalyptic evidence. I argue that the trend to see from the vantage point of the object — the decentering of the human in the idea of a flat ontology — can potentially give in to this fatalism.

My argument about *Lear* is made in the full light of the day, as it were, with the humility that comes from knowing much of the scholarship on Shakespeare's indebtedness to rhetorical traditions has been done (and redone) years ago. In fact, one of the pestering fears with any approach to his work is the idea that

there is nothing new to say. At least it seems so. His work has been revered and studied for so long, scholarship on his work is so robust and varied, that it feels like there is really nothing new that can be said. It's a pestering little truth Shakespeareans rarely talk about. Sure, we may put on a different face when speaking with colleagues in other fields. But when alone, when talking about "work" as readers, students, teachers, and scholars of Shakespeare, what we say is something entirely different. It's a fact of life for Shakespeareans best pondered in our own proverbs about "no stone left unturned," or "no meat left on the bone." (One colleague described it to me as "Shakespeare's been bled.") It drives some of us to antic despair, to drink, to concordances, to write epic footnotes that read like echoes in the Folger Shakespeare Library's vaulted rooms. We talk of the weird, *unheimliche* nature of Shakespeare scholarship, where it seems each of the great interpretations of his writing read sometimes, oddly, like re-packaged older arguments in new forms.

So this is to say I am fully aware I am making my own claims in a lively context and rich archive of historical scholarship on Shakespeare and *King Lear*. Many of the examples of proverbs I cover in the first chapter have been made by others (I make these references clear in my notes). Moreover, opposed to this ennui that comes from the thought there is nothing left to say, there are many inspiring arguments about the posthuman in Shakespeare studies today. It is no surprise that it is already a finely mapped territory whose perspectives and critical vocabulary offer new insights into humans as machines, human consciousness as a constructed, "written" program, or looking at the human–animal divide as an illusion meant to shore up priorities and exceptions to our species. I try to signal the overlapping of my insights with those made in posthuman Shakespeare studies clear as I go, especially in my coda. Finally, Shakespeare's indebtedness to mnemonic literacy is well established through history of the book and memory studies. I want to bring these conversations together to show how the Renaissance idea of rote literacy parallels ideas today about the posthuman body immersed in its environment. Rather than show how the text pro-

motes the illusion of a human exceptionalism, a critical reading strategy offered by many eco-material readings ensconced in a no less modernist mode of interpreting texts as unmasking their ideologies, I argue that *King Lear* stages a form of enmeshed being where humans enact an autonomic conditioned response, reliving the internalized transhistorical collective speech of the adage.

Another caveat that is worth mentioning here is that the study of proverbs, *paramiology*, is its own intellectual tradition within different disciplinary investments, in psychology, linguistics, and folk studies.[3] It is not to be discounted because of the way it can provide what could be called a Bloomian middlebrow or amateur intellectual engagement with literature and the arts. A cursory glance at the Internet will provide many examples of the age-old Renaissance tradition of commonplacing: exhibiting sage advice and counsel through snippets of passages culled from the great authors. But the analysis of proverbs in cognitive sciences and folk traditions is vibrant. I run the risk of taking these approaches for granted if I assume they are working, like the others, free from an historical awareness of the roots of this pedagogy in medieval and Renaissance scholasticism. I try to capitalize on the cognitive science, as I do with the other scientific discourses that define posthuman and eco-materialism today, in my exploration of the mental processes involved when speaking through proverbs. The use of proverbs to garner support for one's political perspective, masking the universal wisdom of one's retrograde politics, is one of the long traditions that haunt *paramiology*. Using common saws to naturalize one's racial stereotypes, for example, is part of the ugly side of any genealogy of a rhetorical strategy. I hope it is clear enough that my flirting with the collective wisdom offered in the adage is made eyes wide open, as they say, to this history of modern invoca-

3 See Robert P. Honeck's *A Proverb in Mind: The Cognitive Science of Proverbial Wit and Wisdom* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997) for a good overview of the approaches.

tions of folk cultures to help shape the commons and its future.[4] If my own romantic conjuring of this received wisdom comes through in my writing, I imagine that I am being swayed by Erasmus's enthusiasm for his own archeological project.

Introductions to academic books can feel sometimes like the brave undoing of their creative acts, like that of Bottom and his rustic crew in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the ways they have to account for their design and intentions, the fearless bunch attempts to explain every gesture and convention to their upcoming production, cutting a hole in Snug's mask to tell the ladies it's not a real lion. "You shall see, it will fall pat as I told you."

I am talking about the book. Not the sparrow.

4 See Wolfgang Mieder's *The Politics of Proverbs: From Traditional Wisdom to Proverbial Stereotypes* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).