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Hansen, Claire (2019) *Reviving Lavinia: aquatic imagery and ecocritical complexity in Titus Andronicus.* **Critical Survey, 31 (3) pp. 53-69.**

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https://doi.org/10.3167/cs.2019.310306

Reviving Lavinia

Aquatic Imagery and Ecocritical Complexity in *Titus Andronicus*

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Abstract

This article revives the agency of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* through a blended ecocritical and complexivist approach. A 'blue' ecocritical lens identifies Lavinia's alignment with aquatic imagery, and tracks the development of this imagery across four main phases in the play: human tears, a river, a flood, and a freeze. These phases broadly map onto different modes of ecological relations as the play explores alternative patterns of human–environmental interactions. Lavinia is reinterpreted as an active and independent complex ecosystem, and one capable of communicating through the same aquatic imagery which is utilised in the narrative to attempt to contain and commodify her. *Titus*'s aquatic discourse finds parallels in our own climate crises, in ongoing problematic associations between women and nature, and in our need to generate new models of agency and ecological relations.

Keywords: agency, climate change, complexity theory, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, Shakespeare, systems, *Titus Andronicus*

Titus Andronicus is a play known to centre on the conflict between civilisation and wilderness, culture and nature, Rome and the forest, and as such it is 'standard terrain' for ecocritical approaches.[1] William Shakespeare and George Peele's[2] play is also characterised by what Jonathan Bate has called 'aquatic imagery' or what Edward Plough refers to in passing as '*Titus*

Andronicus' curiously abundant liquid imagery'.[3] Here we can distinguish between 'green' and 'blue' ecocriticism, counterbalancing what Gabriel Egan calls our preoccupation 'with life on land' by 'stressing a blue ecocriticism that focuses on the life in the oceans' (a distinction Egan critiques).[4] Ecocritical studies have (until recently) largely neglected 'the central significance of the ocean', according to Dan Brayton; all the more surprising because Shakespeare 'imagined a profound relationship between humanity and the ocean'.[5] A 'blue' ecocritical reading of *Titus Andronicus* reveals that Lavinia is the 'conduit' (2.3.30) through which aquatic imagery tends to flow. Titus's daughter embodies four aquatic images: human tears (1.1), a river (2.3), a flood (3.1), and a freeze (3.1 onwards). The recognition of her relationship to the aquatic revives Lavinia's agency within the narrative and illuminates the play's diverse models of human interaction with the natural world.

The study of Shakespearean ecocriticism has burgeoned over the past decade, partly because environmental crises are, according to Egan, 'the most vital present socio-political concern for many readers' and one that 'unites the greatest number of the Earth's inhabitants'.[6] The clarity of purpose and legitimacy of ecocriticism, however, remains contentious, so much so that Rebecca Ann Bach has described ongoing anxieties over ecocritical activism as somewhat 'tedious'.[7] Yet literary studies can be afforded a more significant role in responding to anthropomorphic climate change. The incorporation of ecocriticism into literary studies can be categorised as one of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) recommended approaches for mitigating climate change through education, knowledge-sharing and learning platforms.[8] Patricia Yaeger makes a more direct call for the involvement of literary criticism in responding to the crises affecting the global ocean.[9] Steve Mentz takes a similar stance, arguing that

while literary criticism can't make fresh water out of salt or protect low-lying

cities from tropical storms, it's through language and narrative that our culture

has always grappled with living in an unstable, ocean-drenched environment.[10]

As a systems-based framework, ecocriticism shares common traits with complexity theory: the study of complex systems. Ecological systems are increasingly recognised as 'complex', with characteristics including unpredictability, dynamism and self-organisation.[11] In his discussion of political ecology, Bruno Latour writes that complexity 'always seems to accompany the erecting of an ecological way of thinking'.[12] Joseph Dodds highlights 'the importance of complexity theory in helping to provide a new framework for thinking through our current [climate] crisis'.[13] Importantly, complexity theory is already evident in early modern ecocriticism: both Egan and Robert N. Watson adopt complexivist concepts (self-similarity, fractals, the microcosmic and macrocosmic) for their resonance with early modern ways of thinking about the environment.[14] This approach recognises 'the complexity inherent within the subject; it does not retrospectively introduce it'.[15] An aquatic ecocritical reading of Lavinia is thus not only 'blue' but inherently complexivist.

'Tributary tears'

It is well established that 'Lavinia and the forest in *Titus Andronicus* are imagined as one or nearly one throughout the play'.[16] But from her first entry in *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia is primarily understood through 'aquatic imagery' (1.1.162n). The early scenes of the play repeatedly depict the exploitation of Lavinia's body for its natural water resources. Her 'tributary tears' (1.1.162) are rendered for her 'brethren's obsequies' (1.1.163) as she kneels before her

father 'with tears of joy / Shed on this earth for thy return to Rome' (1.1.164–165). Titus

conceptualises Lavinia as liquid relief: 'Kind Rome, that hast thus lovingly reserved / The

cordial of mine age to glad my heart' (1.1.168–169). Her body provides ritual sacrifice and

comfort to her father. Later in this scene, Demetrius imagines Lavinia as 'the stream' (1.1.633)

to quench his lust. Just as Titus uses Lavinia's 'cordial' to 'glad' his heart (1.1.169), so

Demetrius will use Lavinia's water to 'cool this heat' (1.1.634). Both watery images conjure

Lavinia as a balm applied to ease male suffering; each imagines Lavinia as drinkable, whether

for medicinal value (cordial) or to slake sexual thirst (a stream). Importantly, both require that

she is unspoiled or, more accurately, unspilled, connecting Lavinia to 'the image of the chaste

woman as impermeable container' – impermeable, that is, until Titus or Demetrius require her

resources.[17] After her marriage, Lavinia's body is imagined as an endless liquid supply:

> What, man, more water glideth by the mill
>
> Than wots the miller of, and easy it is
>
> Of a cut loaf to steal a shive, we know.
>
> (1.1.585–587)

There is more than enough of Lavinia's watery form to go around: she is a method of production

and a product for consumption, or, as Coppelia Kahn describes her, 'Lavinia is both the container

they would break open and the valued nourishment it stores'.[18] Tamora also imagines her in

liquid form, figuring her as 'this wasp' who will provide 'the honey we desire' (2.2.131–132), a

metaphor Chiron echoes in imagining Lavinia's 'nice-preserved *honesty*' (2.2.135, my

emphasis). However, here Lavinia's agency first becomes apparent: in Tamora's eyes, Lavinia is

not simply flowing water, passive bread, hunted deer or 'thrash[ed]' corn (2.2.123): as a wasp, she also has the potential 'to sting' (2.2.132).

Through these early exchanges, *Titus* explicitly constructs the concept of nature as 'something made for humanity, something whose meaning lies in the pleasure and profit we derive from it'.[19] This language not only reflects but generates a pattern of interactions: 'words have consequences in the material world', and as the play later illustrates, the rhetoric which transforms Lavinia has material consequences.[20] *Titus*'s insistent conceptualisation of Lavinia as a liquid (tributary tears, a cooling stream, water for the mill, honey) designed for male benefit highlights a long-standing correlation between water resources and the treatment of women. As Lavinia's body and water resources are intertwined in *Titus*, so gender inequality and natural resources remain integrally linked today. Women 'are the principal managers of natural resources' and are thus predominantly responsible for household water supply in Africa and most developing countries.[21] The United Nation's (UN) International Fund for Agricultural Development reports that 'water collection for domestic purposes is generally the responsibility of women and girls in almost all developing countries'.[22] Yet women – who make up 70 per cent of the world's poor and are thus more vulnerable to environmental crises – are often excluded from decision-making about climate change.[23] The Paris Agreement established at the 2015 UN Conference on Climate Change recognised these links between climate change, 'gender equality' and 'empowerment of women'.[24] There are calls to better include women in 'community water management' in developing countries such as Kenya, especially in light of a global water crisis.[25] In a study of a Rajasthani water project, the relationship between women and water was identified as one in which meanings are 'mutually constructed'.[26] Shifts in gender construction thus have implications for our relationship to water resources, and the creation of gender

'through natural resource interventions' has been identified as a gap in feminist political ecology.[27]

Lavinia's association with natural water resources is emblematic of what material feminism has referred to as a 'longstanding, pernicious' association of women and nature in Western culture, an association that has 'made "nature" a treacherous terrain for feminism', with some feminist theory working to 'disentangle "woman" from "nature"'.[28] One response to the association of 'nature' and 'woman' is to seek 'a thorough redefinition and transvaluation of nature' itself.[29] A complexivist framework – which understands that agential interactions generate the system through self-organisation – enacts this redefinition by conceptualising nature as 'an agent in its own terms'.[30] In this model of distributed control, both human and nonhuman elements are active system agents. This begins to reframe the associations between women and water resources exemplified in Lavinia's 'tributary tears'.

'A crimson river'

The correlation between water resources and gender inequality means that not only are women 'disproportionately affected' by climate change, but they are also more likely to be understood as victims rather than agents.[31] Greta Gaard argues that 'the focus on women rather than gender tended to construct women as victims of environmental degradation in need of rescue'.[32]

In a similar act of categorisation, the horrific sexual violence and mutilation which Lavinia endures in *Titus Andronicus* overwhelmingly renders her as victim in subsequent readings, adaptations and criticism. In Julie Taymor's film *Titus*, the victimhood of nature and woman is explicitly collapsed when Lavinia is discovered atop a tree stump in a razed field, branches protruding from her bloodied stubs.[33] Marcus's infamous description of Lavinia's mutilated body

– 'a kind of horrid blazon' – has been identified as a further act of violence upon Lavinia.[34] Bate asks: 'might Marcus' perversely Petrarchan display of the raped Lavinia be a kind of second rape upon her?'[35] Lynn Enterline argues that Lavinia here 'endures yet one more male reading', as 'Marcus' speech perpetuates the violence it haltingly tries to comprehend'.[36] Brayton describes how Lavinia is 'emblematically stripped of all agency in the loss of tongue and hands with which she might tell her story'.[37] However, these readings and their emphasis of Lavinia's passive victimhood are destabilised by an ecocritical complexivist interpretation of Lavinia's body as ecosystem.

This lens supports a different reading of Marcus's blazon, in which Lavinia is imagined as an independent ecosystem containing flora – 'branches', 'lily hands', 'aspen leaves' (2.3.18; 44–45); water – 'a crimson river', 'three issuing spouts' (2.3.22; 30); air – 'stirred with wind', 'honey breath' (2.3.23; 25); and sunlight – 'red as Titan's face' (2.3.31). As Albert H. Tricomi argues, these images of the tree and fountain 'are by no means ornamental'.[38] Lavinia's 'branches' were not only decorative 'sweet ornaments' (2.3.18) but were capable of providing shelter (2.3.19). Her body also contains its own water supply:

> a crimson river of warm blood,
> Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
> Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,
> Coming and going with thy honey breath.
> (2.3.22–25)

While Marcus echoes the language of Lavinia's attackers in this perverse aestheticisation of her 'rosed' lips and 'honey' breath, there is agency in tandem with his excessive rhetorical display: the river is warm, the fountain is animated as it bubbles and stirs, and there is a repetitive, dynamic movement in 'rise and fall' and 'coming and going' (24–25), evoking the regularity of breath and pulse or the repetition of tidal patterns.[39] Further, contemporary images of rivers of milk were a 'pastoral commonplace', which reinforces a connection between rivers and life-giving fluids.[40] Charlotte-Rose Millar also points to early modern beliefs around the interchangeability of blood and milk.[41]

Saturninus is right to ask 'hath the firmament more suns than one?' (5.3.17), for in Lavinia we find a second sun: her cheeks 'look red as Titan's face, / Blushing to be encountered with a cloud' (2.3.31–32). Lavinia comprises an independent and active ecosystem; Marcus marvels at the vitality of her system 'notwithstanding all this loss of blood' (2.3.29). Further, blood loss can be interpreted not as a sign of weakness but as a distribution of power. Decius attempts to convince Caesar and Calphurnia of just this when he reinterprets Calphurnia's dream of Caesar's bleeding statue in *Julius Caesar*:

> It was a vision, fair and fortunate.
>
> Your statue spouting blood in many pipes
>
> In which so many smiling Romans bathed
>
> Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck
>
> Reviving blood, and that great men shall press
>
> For tinctures, stains, relics and cognizance.[42]

It is possible that just as Lavinia's tears are restorative (1.1.168–169), so is her blood 'reviving', a symbol of vitality instead of weakness. A focus on Lavinia's victimhood can thus undermine her robust and functional body-as-ecosystem. Lavinia has been violated, mutilated and abused, but she lives: the blazon undoubtedly grossly aestheticises her suffering but also reveals her body as a dynamic, abundant ecosystem. What has been lost – the 'sweet' branches and 'lily hands' (2.3.18; 44) – is not vital to the system's survival. The system's flora, water and source of light continue to operate, and thus the ecosystem can regenerate. Lavinia is a complex system, and thus, like a biological or ecological system, holds 'the capacity of a part to generate or to regenerate the whole'.[43] Brian C. Goodwin adds:

> The capacity of plants to propagate from leaves and stems, of insects and
> urodeles to regenerate limbs from stumps, and of higher organisms to
> regenerate skin and liver are other manifestations of this same property of parts
> to transform into wholes.[44]

Although her means of communication have been 'cut from' Lavinia (2.3.40), her body can survive. The ability to regenerate is 'one of the fundamental self-organising properties that living creatures display'.[45] Thus the blazon's dismemberment of Lavinia into parts does not negate her whole, because a complex system can produce wholes from its parts. Caroline Lamb comes to a similar conclusion about Lavinia's agency in her argument that in Titus and Lavinia, 'Shakespeare endows the disabled body with the capacity to heal or adapt itself under the most extenuating circumstances'.[46] In *Titus*, physical trauma 'becomes the condition by which bodies strategically adjust and adapt'.[47]

In her regenerative process, Lavinia changes her interactions, founding new connections to support new growth. This new growth does not repair her missing limbs or tongue, nor does it ease the physical pain or psychological distress of violent sexual trauma, but it does provide her with an alternative means of communication. Lavinia's later appropriation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* shows her strategically re-adjusting through the introduction of a new element which enables her (eco)system to communicate. She adapts, utilising her literary knowledge – as Titus admits, she is 'deeper read and better skilled' than her nephew (4.1.33) – as a replacement for her inability to verbally communicate. Lavinia's additional use of the earth's 'sandy plot' (4.1.69) and a staff to communicate details of her sexual assault demonstrates not only what Kahn calls the play's interweaving of a 'politics of textuality' and a 'politics of sexuality' – but also a politics of ecology.[48] Just as 'the conquest of nature required literature's explanatory power and imaginative force', so does Lavinia's violated ecosystem require literature to explain and begin to address what has occurred.[49]

This reinterpretation of Marcus's blazon illustrates how a revisioning of 'blue' nature and the body as complex systems can reshape how we recognise agency. In deliberately reworking the critical lens by which Lavinia is interpreted, this article attempts to change the narrative around Lavinia much as the dialogue around the role of women within the broader 'climate change narrative' must also be altered to afford women and 'nature' greater agency – and even to redefine the terms themselves.[50]

'The weeping welkin'

In the third act of *Titus Andronicus* ecological relations between human agents and aquatic systems – embodied chiefly in Lavinia – reach a critical point: the edge of chaos or bounded

instability.[51] The system achieves a heightened state of chaos in which drastic change is highly likely. The crisis resonates on both a microcosmic and macrocosmic scale: the violence done to Lavinia ripples across the play-world, becoming what the IPCC calls a 'global commons problem', where the actions of one agent affect others.[52]

Lavinia's 'natural' water resources have thus far been effectively managed. She is imagined repeatedly as a contained liquid: from Titus's cordial to the bloody river still partially controlled by 'conduits' (2.3.30). These images build to the 'storm' of tears that Marcus imagines (2.3.54), but these are no longer Lavinia's tears, they are Titus's. The damage done to Lavinia's body disrupts the play's management of water. The waters of Lavinia's system flood beyond her body and into the bodies of the Andronici, generating the potential for change in the system's macrocosmic behavioural patterns. Her physical system is no longer able (or, perhaps, willing) to function as the protective 'circling shadows' (2.3.19) that moderate its flow of water. No longer contained, Lavinia incites a deluge. The waters of her body-as-ecosystem cease to be used by others and begin to act upon others. As the epicentre of the play's aquatic discourse, she 'blind[s]' (2.3.52–53) Titus with tears and 'over-saturates the Andronici'.[53] The sight of the mutilated Lavinia will 'drown the fragrant meads' (2.3.54) and 'consume' (3.1.62) those around her – reversing the earlier dynamic in which *she* was the resource consumed. The world itself is transformed from a 'wilderness of tigers' (3.1.54) to a 'wilderness of sea' (3.1.95), threatening to swallow what is left of humanity in its 'brinish bowels' (3.1.98). Infected by Lavinia, Titus's rhetoric compulsively revolves around this aquatic imagery as he turns from tears, showers and snow (3.1.14; 18; 20) to the sea (3.1.69; 95) and the Nile that 'disdaineth bounds' (3.1.69–72), back to 'fresh tears' like 'honey-dew' (3.1.112–113), to the image of a fountain 'made a brine pit with our bitter tears' (3.1.130). The distinct sources of water begin to intermingle and flood the

imagined landscape, as the water which threatens to 'swallow' (3.1.98) Titus also threatens

environmental damage to the wider ecosystem. There is nowhere for the water to run off; the

Nile has flooded, the tide waxes 'wave by wave' (3.1.96), and Marcus's napkin 'cannot drink a

tear of [Titus's]' (3.1.141) for it is already 'drowned' (3.1.142). With this excess supply of water,

the value of the resource diminishes: it is no longer a product used to buy the empathy of the

earth (3.1.14–22).

      The aquatic imagery expands from the microcosmic ecosystem of Lavinia's body to the

Andronici and their macrocosmic natural environment (3.1.212–214). This marks a transition in

the way in which Titus configures his relationship to Lavinia, the natural world and its water

resources.

> When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?
>
> If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,
>
> Threatening the welkin with his big-swollen face?
>
> And wilt thou have a reason for this coil?
>
> I am the sea. Hark how her sighs doth blow.
>
> She is the weeping welkin, I the earth.
>
> Then must my sea be moved with her sighs,
>
> Then must my earth with her continual tears
>
> Become a deluge overflowed and drowned,
>
> For why my bowels cannot hide her woes,
>
> But like a drunkard must I vomit them.
>
> (3.1.222–232)

Boundaries between Lavinia and Titus, and between body and environment, become increasingly ambiguous in Titus's rhetoric. Initially, the 'sighs' of the Andronici will 'breathe the welkin dim' and 'stain the sun' (3.1.212–213), but Titus's language quickly transforms Lavinia herself into 'the weeping welkin', as he announces 'I am the sea' and 'I the earth', which are 'moved', 'overflowed and drowned' by the 'continual tears' (229) of Lavinia as welkin. The repetition of third person pronouns ('her' [3.1.226, 228, 229, 231]; 'she' [3.1.227]) emphasises the pervasiveness of Lavinia's influence on Titus's 'bottomless' passions (3.1.218) and his imagined ecosystem. This reinforces that for early modern Europeans,

> To report on an emotion – whether an emotion as witnessed in another person
> or experienced in oneself – was to describe an event occurring in nature and
> understandable in natural terms. … Emotions were a body's weather, its winds,
> and its waves.[54]

The emotions in Titus exceed physiological 'limits' (3.1.221) in an example of what Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett Sullivan Jr. call 'the porousness of an early modern body that takes the environment into itself or spills out of its own bounds'.[55] The aquatic imagery explicitly 'spills out' beyond the physical bodies of Lavinia and Titus, merging body, emotion and watery environment. This disruptive state of bounded instability produces new modes of interaction between self and other, body and environment. The play incorporates (in one scene) all four models of Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan Jr.'s 'taxonomy of ecological relations', designed to understand the 'complexity of the early modern somatic ecology'.[56] The first model of similitude

is exemplified in the comparisons of Lavinia's body to water, flora and fauna – 'fresh tears' stand on her cheeks 'as doth the honey-dew / Upon a gathered lily almost withered' (3.1.112– 114; see also 3.1.86–87, 90–91). However, the play immediately turns to an 'exchange model', when 'emphasis is placed upon that which crosses the threshold of the body' through the image of a drunkard forced to 'vomit' Lavinia's excess woes (3.1.232), as 'fluids are taken in and expelled'.[57] The third type of ecological relation, the counteractive model in which the body is understood 'in opposition or through resistance to the environment', is made explicit when Titus imagines himself as

> one upon a rock,
> Environed with a wilderness of sea,
> Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
> Expecting ever when some envious surge
> Will in his brinish bowels swallow him.
> (3.1.94–98)

The imagined 'surge' waiting to consume Titus perfectly embodies a 'fundamentally oppositional' transaction between body and environment.[58] Yet, in a further complication, the image shifts almost immediately from Titus as the victim swallowed by the 'brinish bowels' of the wild sea, to Titus himself as the one who will swallow and purge the overflowing waters (3.1.230–234). Over the course of one scene, *Titus* illustrates the instability and mutability of ecological relations between 'human' and 'blue' nature.

The image of Titus as 'sea' and 'earth' to Lavinia's 'weeping welkin' (3.1.227) disperses agency across the imagined environment, and so embodies a fourth model of dispersion or distribution, in which 'not only is subjectivity distributed across bodies and environment, but the environment itself can also be seen as exercising the kind of agency usually limited to the subject'.[59] This model is complexivist in its recognition of distributed agency (located not in one individual but across a system). Lavinia's aquatic imagery bleeds beyond the boundaries of her character, seeping into Titus and proliferating across the play, engendering an extended aquatic metaphor by which the Andronici imagine themselves and their relation to others. Change in one agent causes change in another, a phenomenon which Titus expresses as a compulsion in his repetition of 'must': Titus's sea 'must' be moved by Lavinia's sighs (3.1.228), his earth 'must' be drowned by her tears (3.1.229), he 'must' vomit her excess woes (3.1.232). In this way, boundaries between human and nonhuman parts become less sturdy as interactions are privileged over isolated elements. The individual is no longer seen as 'autonomous and bounded' and agency is located not in actors but in interactions.[60] With agency distributed across an aquatic ecosystem comprising bodies, earth, sky and waters, the 'artificial' distinction between the earth's animate and inanimate parts must be reimagined.[61] This invites us to imagine 'what agency would look like in an other-than-human sense'; agency 'without a subject, actions without actors', and 'matter as activity rather than passive substance'.[62]

The play's distribution of agency across the aquatic ecosystem is framed as a rejection of 'reason' by Marcus (3.1.219, 220, 225) when he critiques Titus's invocation of the elements and begs him to 'speak with possibility' (3.1.215). But in a distributed model of ecological relations where the environment and humans share agency, 'speech is no longer a specifically human property'.[63] In the words of Latour:

To limit the discussion to humans, their interests, their subjectivities, and their

rights, will appear as strange a few years from now as having denied the right

to vote of slaves, poor people, or women. To use the notion of discussion while

limiting it to humans alone, without noticing that there are millions of subtle

mechanisms capable of adding new voices to the chorus, would be to allow

prejudice to deprive us of the formidable power of the sciences.[64]

This applies to Lavinia as it does to the play's aquatic ecosystems: Lavinia, frequently imagined

as a nonhuman animal or water resource, is made voiceless, and thus – like Latour's concept of

nonhumans – requires a prosthesis to 'participate in the discussions of humans'.[65] One such

speech prosthesis is the play's aquatic imagery; excess water is utilised to express the full extent

of Lavinia's trauma – the violence done to her has 'overflowed and drowned' her family

(3.1.230).[66] But if aquatic imagery speaks for Lavinia, what is to say that she is not also speaking

on its behalf? Lavinia's expression of tears and liquids, mill water and honey, rivers, weeping

welkins and oceans, may in fact be imagined as the deeper nonhuman speech (in Latour's use of

the term) of the aquatic systems whose images fuel the play. Just as Lavinia uses Ovid's

Metamorphoses to communicate, Shakespeare's sea stories 'can help unfold the rich and strange

history of our imagined relationship with the biggest thing on our planet'.[67] In this way,

Shakespeare can be drawn in as a spokesperson – and his plays and characters as speech

prostheses – for the ocean.

    Titus presents a failure of the containment and control model of ecological relations; its

deluge cannot be contained by tradition or ritual (Act One), violent force (Act Two), or even

reason (Act Three). The play experiments with a range of models until it arrives at a climactic and chaotic moment in which human–environmental boundaries are challenged and there is potential to recognise agency across the human and nonhuman divide. At this tipping point of bounded instability, the world of *Titus* could embrace a distributed model of ecological relations, or regress to established, damaging ecological patterns. *Titus Andronicus* does the latter.

'Frozen water'

When the heads of Martius and Quintus are shown to the remaining Andronici (3.1.234.1), the play's excess water is replaced by a sudden freeze; the imagery transitions sharply to the containment of water. Marcus calls for hot Etna to 'cool' (3.1.242); Lavinia's kiss is 'comfortless / As frozen water' (3.1.251–252); the family are 'struck pale and bloodless … / like a stony image, cold and numb' (3.1.258–259). Although Marcus calls for another 'storm', Titus is now 'still' (3.1.264) with 'not another tear to shed' (3.1.267). Lavinia's tears and the excess water she stimulates are rejected. Titus no longer encourages Lavinia as the 'weeping welkin' (3.1.227) but recommends she control her tears by creating a 'hole' to 'drown' her heart (3.2.17–20). His advice for his crying grandson Lucius is similar: 'Peace, tender sapling, thou art made of tears, / And tears will quickly melt thy life away' (3.2.50–51). In recruiting Lavinia to 'receive the blood' (5.2.197; 5.2.183) of her rapists, Titus again understands fluids as something to be contained and consumed, and Lavinia as the means by which to do so. Titus's attitude has turned 'ecophobic', as his 'subsequent view of nature endorses separation'.[68] Titus embodies a regression to a counteractive, oppositional model of ecological relations.

However, there is a critical distinction in the containment model of water resources at this point: Lavinia's resources are not used for consumption by others – they are internalised. Her

father suggests that to still her 'outrageous' heartbeat (3.2.13), she should pierce a hole against her heart,

> That all the tears that thy poor eyes let fall
>
> May run into that sink and, soaking in,
>
> Drown the lamenting fool in sea-salt tears.
>
> (3.2.18–20)

Having lost the use of her hands, Lavinia's production of liquids is envisaged as an alternative means of agency. She also retains control: it is Lavinia who is imagined as creating the hole, and directing the tears to drown her heart; and shortly after, she indicates of her own volition (presuming Titus's interpretation of her signs is accurate) to drink 'no other drink but tears' (3.2.37). Again, her body produces consumable liquids; the vocabulary – 'brewed' and 'mashed' (3.2.38) – invokes the process of tea-making (3.2.38n). However, Lavinia's production of liquid is no longer depicted as supplying others; it is reabsorbed by her own body. Her tears are a means of violence against herself. This blurs two models of Lavinia's aquatic imagery: her body as a producer (and container) of liquids for consumption, and her body as an agent capable of inciting floods. But there is no longer an imagined world to feed or flood. Faced with the reality that there is no external nature to act 'as a standard, a foil, a reserve, a resource, and a public dumping ground', the play-world's ecology leads Lavinia to '*internalize* the environment'.[69] This implies an awareness that if 'the Earth itself is the collective organism then there is no surrounding region (that is, environment) to speak of'.[70] For Egan, such a realisation is ecologically beneficial: agency is redistributed across humans and nonhumans. In Latour's

words, 'there is *no more environment*, no zone of reality in which we could casually rid ourselves of the consequences of human political, industrial, and economic life'.[71] Lavinia's internalisation of her own aquatic resources collapses producer and consumer, human and nonhuman, civilisation and environment.

Lavinia's agency – distributed across the play's aquatic imagery – endures beyond her death, permeating the final scenes of *Titus*. The aquatic ecosystem functions as a 'social actor' and spokesperson which enables Lavinia to haunt the play's conclusion.[72] At Lavinia's death, it is the tears that she engenders which are assigned blame. When Saturninus demands, 'What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?' (5.3.47), Titus answers: 'Killed her for whom my tears have made me blind' (5.3.48). While Saturninus explicitly identifies her death as 'unnatural' (5.3.47), for Titus, it is Lavinia's very relationship to the natural system that makes her death necessary: her excessive production of water is causally linked to her death. Her excess water also instigates significant changes in the political systems of *Titus*, playing a key role in Lucius's alliance with the Goths: when Lucius is banished 'weeping' from Rome (5.3.104), the Goths 'drowned their enmity in my [Lucius's] true tears / And oped their arms to embrace me as a friend' (5.3.106–107). The play-world's aquatic imagery produces an unexpected, emergent result in its political system: an unheralded alliance between Lucius and the Goths. Lucius also reaffirms the predominance of aquatic imagery in the play's final moments: assuming Lavinia's earlier role (1.1.163–165), he says 'nature puts me to a heavy task' (5.3.149), shedding 'obsequious tears' (5.3.151) and 'sorrowful drops' (5.3.153) on Titus's body. Lucius encourages his son to follow this pattern of behaviour: 'learn of us / To melt in showers' (5.3.159–160). The boy finds himself overcome with water: 'I cannot speak to him for weeping, / My tears will choke me if I ope my mouth' (5.3.173–174). Marcus experiences the same phenomenon: 'floods of tears will drown

my oratory' (5.3.89). *Titus*'s excessive aquatic imagery – which provides a speech prosthesis for

Lavinia – continues to affect the voices of other characters in its permeation of the play's

language after her death.

While the play flirts with the potential for Lucius to embrace Lavinia's aquatic imagery

(and the distributed model of ecological relations it implies), Lucius ultimately resurrects the

oppositional, ecophobic patterns established by his father. He shows no 'investment in

expunging the notion that humans exist apart from other life forms'.[73] His final acts move

decisively away from the blue towards the green, as nature is invoked punitively yet passively as

a vehicle of punishment in the executions of Aaron and Tamora, the former buried in the earth

and the latter left for the birds (5.3.178–182; 194–199). Vernon Guy Dickson believes that

Lucius's final actions 'raise significant questions about the future of Rome and the precedents he

is reiterating'.[74] Helga L. Duncan's argument supports this reading, as she observes that 'Lucius

defines Roman sacred space according to the inflexible spatial logic of his father'.[75] In her

reading, the play shows us a world 'in which the old sacred geography is outmoded and

irrecoverable and a new one not yet available'.[76] Lucius, and thus the play's conclusion, model

the failed ecological movements that Latour describes as having 'sought to position themselves

on the political chessboard without redrawing its squares, without redefining the rules of the

game, without redesigning the pawns'.[77] Lucius fails to understand that nature is not a 'sphere of

reality but the result of a political division' which separates beings into 'humans and nonhumans,

objects and subjects' and designates their type of power and ability to speak.[78] The play reverts

to imagining its characters as consumable natural resources: where initially Lavinia was the corn

to be 'thrash[ed]' (2.2.123), by the end of the play all of Rome is 'scattered corn' (5.3.70). In a

play so concerned with imitation, emulation and patterning, humankind and nature finally mirror each other in their utter lack of empathy.

Titus thus fails to support the model of ecological relations suggested in Lavinia's integration of the aquatic and human, the literary and the natural. The play does not 'intimate a new world order' – as Elizabeth D. Gruber argues – so much as desperately illustrate the *need* for a new world order to be found.[79] Latour comments that it is not enough to simply bring '"man and nature" together in order to resolve ecological crises'.[80] As Greg Garrard remarks: 'if our existing conceptions of "nature" could really do the aesthetico-political duty required of them, they would be doing it already'.[81] Naomi Klein makes a similar call in her argument that 'we need to think differently, radically differently'.[82] Gregory Bateson believes that 'the most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way'.[83] Egan reiterates this, arguing that 'new ways of thinking about humankind's relations with the Earth' are urgently needed, and that disrupting 'still-persisting habits of thought' about this relationship 'is the most important intellectual project for the twenty-first century'.[84]

Yet despite Titus's final reversion to an oppositional model of ecological relations, Lavinia's aquatic imagery remains a persistent, subversive element pervading the play's discourse well after her death. It briefly imagines how we may rework our understanding of the relationships between women, ecosystems and their water resources, and the concept of agency itself.

Conclusion

Through the aquatic imagery generated by and around Lavinia, she is reinterpreted as an active and independent complex ecosystem capable of regenerating, and one also capable of

communicating through the adoption of speech prostheses and spokespersons – namely, through the same aquatic imagery that is utilised in the narrative to attempt to contain and commodify her. Lavinia's movement through the play not only demonstrates that she is central to the construction of the relationship between the cultural and natural worlds, but also illustrates how through her suffering, she begins to generate alternative modes of interacting with the systems she inhabits and new ways of recognising agency. Lavinia thus sparks a dialogue around how we might attribute agency to nonhuman parts of the systems we engage with and are embedded within.

The limitations of existing models for conceptualising human–environment relations – and the difficulty of generating alternatives – are made plain both in *Titus*'s failure to achieve a successful pattern of ecological relations, and in our own contemporary public discourse around anthropogenic climate change. A new vocabulary is required to imagine the relationship between nature and humanity, as Latour attempts to create by 'put[ting] an end to the anthropomorphism of the object-subject division' through 'sharing the competencies of speech, association, and reality among humans and nonhumans'.[85] This new vocabulary should upend previous definitions of 'nature' and understandings of 'agency': Yaeger suggests that oceans should be endowed with 'standing', and in the complexities which this concept adumbrates, not only will science and law prove crucial, 'but literary know-how could also matter'.[86] We could take a leaf from Lavinia's book and experiment with new ways of acting, being and communicating, to avoid repeating patterns which complexity theory refers to as dominant system 'attractors', states or modes of behaviour that the system prefers and towards which the system 'converges over time'.[87] *Titus* illustrates the power of dominant attractors and the difficulty of transitioning to alternative modes of behaviour.

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A new vocabulary is modelled in this article by 'reviving' Lavinia, who offers a prototype – framed via an ecocritical complexivist lens – of the body as an ecosystem which can voice and be voiced by nonhuman (and here aquatic) elements. This recognises Lavinia's pervasive aquatic imagery and its distribution across *Titus Andronicus.*

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Notes

1. Lynne Bruckner, 'Teaching Shakespeare in the Ecotone', in *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, ed. Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 223–238, here 228.

2. Gary Taylor notes that *Titus Andronicus* is 'now accepted as collaborative by all the leading attribution specialists'. Gary Taylor, 'Why Did Shakespeare Collaborate?', *Shakespeare Survey* 67 (2014), 1–17, here 1. It has also been suggested that Thomas Middleton 'probably' wrote the 'fly scene' (3.2) for a 'posthumous theatrical revival'. See Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus and Gabriel Egan, eds, *The New Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 186.

3. Jonathan Bate, ed., *Titus Andronicus* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), 1.1.162n. All subsequent references to this edition will be incorporated in the body of the article.

Edward Plough, '*Titus Andronicus* Underwater', in *News from the Raven: Essays from Sam Houston State University on Medieval and Renaissance Thought*, ed. Darci N. Hill (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 144–152, here 144.

4. Gabriel Egan, *Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 33. For more on the 'blue humanities', see the work of Steve Mentz, including, most recently: Steve Mentz, 'Shakespeare and the Blue Humanities', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 59, no. 2 (2019), 383-392.

5. Dan Brayton, *Shakespeare's Ocean: An Ecocritical Exploration* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 4. Since this article went to press, the significance of the ocean and 'blue' ecocriticism in Shakespeare studies has received further critical attention, as evidenced in the recent 'cluster of essays grouped under the title "Shakespeare's Waters"'. Logan D. Browning, 'Introduction: Shakespeare's Waters.' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 59, no. 2 (2019), 325–327, here 325.

6. Egan, *Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory*, 21.

7. Rebecca Ann Bach, '*Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* by Simon C. Estok and *Ecocritical Shakespeare* ed. by Dan Brayton and Lynne Bruckner (Review)', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2013), 110–113, here 112–113. See also Simon C. Estok, 'Afterword: Ecocriticism on the Lip of a Lion', in Bruckner and Brayton, *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, 239–246, here 239; Julian Yates and Garrett Sullivan, 'Introduction', *Shakespeare Studies* 39 (2011), 23–31, here 25; and Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton, 'Introduction: Warbling Intruders', in Bruckner and Brayton, *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, 1–9, here 2.

8. 'IPCC, 2014: Summary for Policymakers - Working Group II (Impacts)', in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects.*

Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, ed. C. B. Field et al. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 27.

9. Patricia Yaeger, 'Editor's Column: Sea Trash, Dark Pools, and the Tragedy of the Commons', *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010), 523–545, here 540.

10. Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 98.

11. Lael Parrott, 'Measuring Ecological Complexity', *Ecological Indicators* 10, no. 6 (2010), 1069–1076, here 1069. See also Claire Hansen, *Shakespeare and Complexity Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

12. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 199.

13. Joseph Dodds, *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos: Complexity Theory, Deleuze/Guattari and Psychoanalysis for a Climate in Crisis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 149.

14. Egan refers directly to complex systems (*Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory*, 13), arguing that the Great Chain of Being 'prefigures the notion of self-similarity from complexity theory'. See Greg Garrard, 'Foreword', in Bruckner and Brayton, *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, xvii–xxiv, here xix. Also see Egan, 'Gaia and the Great Chain of Being', in Bruckner and Brayton, *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, 57–69, here 57; and Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 26–27. Watson suggests that Shakespeare was well aware of patterns of self-similarity, 'orders of scale and fractal

symmetries'. Robert N. Watson, 'The Ecology of Self in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', in Bruckner and Brayton, *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, 33–56, here 36.

15. Hansen, *Shakespeare and Complexity Theory*, 3.

16. Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Mutilated Garden in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Studies* 9, no. 1 (1976), 89–105, here 91. Conversely, for a reading of Lavinia as symbolic of the Roman state, see Marion Wynn-Davies, '"The Swallowing Womb": Consumed and Consuming Women in *Titus Andronicus*', in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 129–151, here 139.

17. Coppelia Kahn, 'The Daughter's Seduction in *Titus Andronicus*, or, Writing is the Best Revenge', in *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 46–76, here 50.

18. Ibid., 53.

19. Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 335.

20. Ibid., 47–48.

21. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 'Gender and Climate Change', 2015, http://unfccc.int/gender_and_climate_change/items/7516.php; Patricia Figueiredo and Patricia E. Perkins, 'Women and Water Management in Times of Climate Change: Participatory and Inclusive Processes', *Journal of Cleaner Production* 60, no. 1 (2013), 188–194, here 188.

22. Robina Wahaj and Maria Hartl, 'Gender and Water – Securing Water for Improved Rural Livelihoods: The Multiple-Uses System Approach', The International Fund for Agricultural

Development, 2012, https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/2ffa1e63-8a8e-47ed-a4aa-cbf249fafab2, 6.

23. UNFCCC, 'Gender and Climate Change'; Greta Gaard, 'Ecofeminism and Climate Change', *Women's Studies International Forum* 49 (2015), 20–33, here 23.

24. UNFCCC, 'Adoption of the Paris Agreement', 12 December 2015, http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09.pdf, 1, 2. The identification of gender issues in the Paris Agreement was critiqued by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (wedo.org). The 2015 UN Climate Change Conference's Gender Composition report also identified internal gender imbalances (United Nations Office, 'Report on Gender Composition', November 2015, http://unfccc.int/documentation/documents/advanced_search/items/6911.php?priref=600008626#beg).

25. Sarah Yerian, Monique Hennink, Leslie E. Greene, Daniel Kiptugen, Jared Buri and Matthew C. Freeman, 'The Role of Women in Water Management and Conflict Resolution in Marsabit, Kenya', *Environmental Management* 54, no. 6 (2014), 1320–1330, here 1320.

26. Kathleen O'Reilly, '"Traditional" Women, "Modern" Water: Linking Gender and Commodification in Rajasthan, India', *Geoforum* 37, no. 6 (2006), 958–972, here 958.

27. Ibid., 959.

28. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', in *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 1–19, here 12; and Alaimo, 'Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature', in Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, 237–264, here 239.

29. Alaimo and Hekman, 'Introduction', 12.

30. Ibid.

31. Figueiredo and Perkins, 'Women and Water Management', 188; and G. Terry, ed., *Climate Change and Gender Justice* (Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing in Association with Oxfam GB, 2009), 3.

32. Gaard, 'Ecofeminism and Climate Change', 21.

33. Julie Taymor, dir., *Titus*, Clear Blue Sky Productions and Overseas Filmgroup, 1999.

34. Vernon Guy Dickson, '"A Pattern, Precedent, and Lively Warrant": Emulation, Rhetoric, and Cruel Propriety in *Titus Andronicus*', *Renaissance Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2009), 376–409, here 400.

35. Bate, *Titus Andronicus*, 35.

36. Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

37. Brayton, *Shakespeare's Ocean*, 104.

38. Tricomi, 'The Mutilated Garden', 91.

39. On tidal metaphors, see Brayton, *Shakespeare's Ocean*, 86.

40. Watson, *Back to Nature*, 6.

41. Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2017), 122.

42. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell (London: Cengage Learning, 1998), 2.2.84–89.

43. Brian C. Goodwin, 'Developing Organisms as Self-Organising Fields', in *Self-Organising Systems: The Emergence of Order*, ed. F. Eugene Yates et al. (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1987), 167–180, here 177.

44. Ibid., 178.

45. Ibid.

46. Caroline Lamb, 'Physical Trauma and (Adapt)ability in *Titus Andronicus*', *Critical Survey* 22, no. 1 (2010), 41–57, here 42.

47. Ibid.

48. Kahn, 'The Daughter's Seduction', 47. See also Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5.

49. Elizabeth D. Gruber, 'Building the Necropolis: Killing Mother/Nature in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 25, no. 4 (2014), 271–290, here 272.

50. Figueiredo and Perkins, 'Women and Water Management', 188.

51. Ralph D. Stacey, *Complexity and Creativity in Organisations* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996), 97.

52. 'IPCC, 2014: Summary for Policymakers – Working Group III (Mitigation)', in *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. O. Edenhofer et al. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

53. Bethany Packard, 'Lavinia as Co-author of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 50, no. 2 (2010), 281–300, here 290.

54. Gail Kern Paster, 'Becoming the Landscape: The Ecology of the Passions in the Land of Temperance', in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. Mary Floyd-

Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 137–152, here 139.

55. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., 'Introduction: Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World', in Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan, *Environment and Embodiment*, 1–13, here 2.

56. Ibid., 3.

57. Ibid., 4.

58. Ibid., 5.

59. Ibid., 6.

60. Diane Larsen-Freeman and Lynne Cameron, *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35.

61. Egan, 'Gaia and the Great Chain of Being', 64.

62. Alaimo, 'Trans-corporeal Feminisms', 245.

63. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 65.

64. Ibid., 69.

65. Ibid., 67.

66. Lavinia also uses Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as her spokesperson and the staff and earth as her speech prostheses (4.1.69–80).

67. Mentz, *At the Bottom*, 99.

68. See Simon C. Estok, *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Gruber, 'Building the Necropolis', 282.

69. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 58. Emphasis in original.

70. Egan, *Shakespeare and Ecocritical Theory*, 58.

71. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 58. Emphasis in original.

72. Ibid., 76–77.

73. Bruckner and Brayton, 'Introduction', 3.

74. Dickson, 'A Pattern', 404.

75. Helga L. Duncan, '"Sumptuously Re-Edified": The Reformation of Sacred Space in *Titus Andronicus*', *Comparative Drama* 43, no. 4 (2009), 425–453, here 428.

76. Ibid., 432–433.

77. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 5.

78. Ibid., 231, 239.

79. Gruber, 'Building the Necropolis', 272.

80. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 57.

81. Garrard, 'Foreword', xxiii.

82. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (London: Penguin, 2014), 23.

83. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson, 1987), 468. However, he adds that he does not know 'how to think that way'.

84. Egan, *Green Shakespeare*, 175.

85. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 82.

86. Yaeger, 'Editor's Column', 540.

87. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, *Complex Systems*, 49; Scott Camazine et al., *Self-Organisation in Biological Systems* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 32.